# VIDYAPATI

## A

## Political Analysis

BY
Dr. Shankar Kumar Jha
PRINCIPAL
PURNIA COLLEGE, PURNIA

SHIVAANI PRAKASHAN
DARBHANGA

# VIDYAPATI : A POLITICAL ANALYSIS

*

*By*
DR. SHANKAR KUMAR JHA
PRINCIPAL,
PURNIA COLLEGE, PURNIA.

*

SHIVAANI PRAKASHAN
DARBHANGA
1983

*Published by :*
**SHIVAANI PRAKASHAN**
Kanhaiyaji Kothi,
Kameshwaranagar,
DARBHANGA.

*First Edition :*
February, 1983–1,000 Copies.

*Price :*
STUDENT EDITION : Rs. 10/= only
LIBRARY EDITION : Rs. 15/= only

*Printed at :*
L. N. MITHILA UNIVERSITY PRESS
KAMESHWARANAGAR,
DARBHANGA.

# Foreword

Vidyapati, a court-poet and personal friend of Shiva Sinha, an Oinwar ruler of mediaeval Mithila, is known in the country and abroad mainly for his songs and lyrics, erotic and devotional. It is not, perhaps, widely known that the Vidyapati corpus available to us is made up of compositions in three languages, namely, Sanskrit, Abahatta or Mithilapabhransha, and Maithili. What is even more important in the context of the present study, Vidyapati was a scholar in his own right, though grudgingly, if at all, recognized as such by the contemporary Pandits, and a man well-versed in statecraft and fully conversant with socio-political problems of the day. We do not know for certain the order in which his works were written and have to make do with guesses regarding the occasion and purpose of his non-poetical writings. Dearth of biographical material and non-availability of contemporary or near-contemporary manuscripts make the task of determining the Vidyapati canon extremely difficult. No successful attempt has so far been made to separate the

authentic works from the spurious. The inundation of Ph.D. theses on Vidyapati does not make us less ignorant.

Dr. Shankar Kumar Jha has commendably tried to fill one gap with the present publication. His socio-political studies should be of immense value and arouse the interest of all students of mediaeval Mithila. This collection of his research papers should whet the appetite of the readers and make them eagerly await the publication of Dr. Jha's doctoral dissertation. It should also prompt the Vidyapati scholars to leave the beaten track and venture into the hitherto unexplored areas.

***Umanath Jha***
*Professor & Head* (retd.)
University Department of English,
*Ex Pro Vice-Chancellor*
**L. N. Mithila University,**
**Darbhanga.**

# THE INTRODUCTION

The exhortations made by the leading Indian Political Scientists of the post-Independence years to delve deep into the literature of the past to re-discover the richness and variety of political wisdom had deeply impressed me in my early career as a teacher of Political Science. This sense of professional commitment got a phillip by equally serious requests from the colleagues with commendable background of regional literature to trace out the politico-sociological aspects in the works of well-known literary figures. That's how the author got to go deep in the works of Vidyapati, the well-known literary figure, whose works have been translated in various languages under the auspices of the UNESCO.

The serious study of the works of this medieval literary giant made me realise that non-poetic works of Vidyapati were no less poignant than his poetic works. Reading his "Purush Pariksha"—the author believes this to be his magnum opus—and its English translation by renowned Indologist Grierson the author got spell-bound by lucid exposition of the essentials of statecraft through the medium of tales. This single book which Vidyapati described himself as a book on the "Knotty Science of Politics" replete with such progressive ideology as Humanism and Egalitarianism and reflections on diplomacy, council of ministers, civil service etc. convinced me that Vidyapati could be and should be studied as a relevant source for the study of contemporary politics in its national and regional setting. That explains the choice of my topic "Political ideas and institutions in the works of Vidyapati, with special reference to Purush Pariksha" for my doctoral thesis.

After I obtained the doctorate for my thesis from the Bihar University, Muzaffarpur, my colleagues and friends as also the ever-growing number of Vidyapati fans cutting across caste and regional boundaries have been pressing me to get the thesis published. Due to circumstances beyond my control and constraints of sorts, it was not possible for me to publish my doctoral thesis. However, encouraged by the doctorate and the interest and

appreciation evinced by social scientists from different parts of the country I kept up interpreting Vidyapati's ideas in Politico-social terms and getting them published in various journals from time to time. The present work is a compilation of those research articles which I did on the basis of his works, including his poems and religious books. I express my thanks to the Publishers and Editors of those journals which have allowed me to publish in this book the articles published in their journals.

A perusal of the different articles would give the proof of my thesis that a typical Renaissance genius that Vidyapati was he dwelt at length on different aspects of politics, including diplomacy, economy, law, statecraft in general. He would in this respect command a comparision with that western Renaissance genius Machiavelli—versatile and varied, giving counsels of successful politics and administration to the "Prince". Like his contemporary peers of the west, Vidyapati also preferred the medium of the local language and the frame-work of the stories in the Panchtantra tradition to bring home the lessons of a successful polity in the historical back-drop of medieval India.

I am conscious of the fact that the pieces culled together here do not read a systematic treatise on politics But the selections made here out of my numerous papers and articles pertaining to the socio-political treatment of the Vidyapati literature are meant to high-light three important features which I had found missing before I presented my thesis in the earlier scholarly works and expositions on Vidyapati, most of which had veered round the question whether he was a romantic or spiritual, or whether he was a worshipper of one sect of Hinduism or every sect. Regrettably even first grade commentators of Vidyapati literature had missed these significant non-literary politico-social dimensions of Vidyapati literature. This assorted work seeks to fill that gap and highlight the politico-social aspects in the works of Vidyapati.

To begin with, Vidyapati might have been great as a poet, but he was greater as a Statesman and like Kautilya, whose precepts he followed in many ways. Vidyapati tried to explain the total gamut of contemporary institutions, political, social, economic, legal and cultural in the light of certain ideologies and norms. To



illustrate, Vidyapati asserts that a king must be benevolent, righteous, respectful and kind. In the piece "Vidyapati's ideal of Rajdharma" it has been elaborately elucidated that for Vidyapati a king devoid of his sense of duty is not a king in the strict sense of the term—"when a king, like an elephant blind with intoxication and in his insolence disregarding his driver's commands hath strayed from his kingly duty, without doubt he is naught but a robber".

Even in politics, Vidyapati was not a visionary but a hard-boiled realist like Machiavelli. A cursory reading of the first piece of this collection "Vidyapati's treatment of Diplomacy and Inter-State relations" would show that Vidyapati was emphatic that "Peace is good but to appease the enemy for buying Peace is bad". In the same piece we learn that Vidyapati held the ideal that "in the face of an irresistable calamity resignation verily is wholesome; but, if he have the power to resist, a wise man cometh to action, not waiteth he one moment in delay". It is significant to note that Vidyapati advocated the same privileges and courtesies to diplomatic personnel as are conventionally accepted in the western world of International Law.

Yet another striking political facet of Vidyapati's literature lay in the field of nation building. I am inclined to hold that the age in which Vidyapati flourished was the age of cultural nationalism or sub-nationalism. If you prefer to call it, and Vidyapati's own contribution in buttressing this brand of nationalism was not insignificant. "Desil Bayena Sab Jana Mittha", meaning that one's mother-tongue is dear to every one" heralded the onset of a sub-nationalism which rested upon the popularity of the language of the masses in rejection of the language of the elite; on glorification of the natural sights and sounds, on idealising the prowess of the goddess of the might, Durga—and on secularising of the Hindu fold. In all these aspects he resembles in many ways three eminent modern Indian thinkers Bankim Chandra ( author of the Anand Math), Tagore and Iqbal.

Last but not the least, Vidyapati deserves to be studied as a progressive social thinker, who was sensitive to the existing socio-economic inequality and who had the boldness of a Marx and Lenin to expose the hollowness of the unjust contemporary order

with a view to usher in an egalitarian society. In the piece on "Usur. in medieval Mithila based on Vidyapati's Likhnavali" I have tried to prove how Vidyapati exposed the economics of rural indebtedness and the callous indifference of the state not to do anything to ameliorate the condition of the exploited poor class. In fact, long before Lincon he had raised the banner against the institution of slavery. He had even espoused the ideal of equality of sexes long before J. S. Mill. My analysis in "Vidyapati, the prophet of Proletariat" would show that in ways more than one Vidyapati had tried to give a fair deal to the contemporary womanhood, which was denied then. It has been my contention that even though Vidyapati belonged to an elite order, he was alive to the needs and aspirations of the common men and women. In the piece "A Study of Vidyapati's Danavakyavali", I have tried to show that he departed from the traditional treatment of "Dan" (gift) by omitting the great kingly items of gifts and preferred to point out the virtues of gift of such items which even the common man could afford. Vidyapati like Gandhijee & Bhave also suggested liberality of attitude on the part of the well-to-do section of the community.

I hope this introduction will help the reader in studying Vidyapati in a new perspective. I am thankful to the editors of different journals who have allowed me to print my article published therein. I am also thankful to the Special Officer of the Bihar University for permitting me to use certain chapters of my thesis presented to the Bihar University, Muzaffarpur, in partial fulfilment for the award of Ph. D. I have acknowledged separately the source from where the pieces are culled. A special word of thanks to the young enterprising publisher who has encouraged me to do this exercise when I had lost all hopes to get my ideas in the print. To Professor Uma Nath Jha, Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the L. N. Mithila University, I owe a special debt. He not only has encouraged me in academic pursuits but has served as an example of how even a busy academician can serve the community by living faithfully upto certain value-norms. I pray to God to give me the opportunity to expand and elucidate my reflections on facets of Vidyapati's life and politics when my Ph. D. thesis with revisions made in the



light of suggestions made by teacher-like-colleagues like Dr. A. D. Pant of Allahabad University, my research guide, Dr. Chetakar Jha and Dr. V. Prasad Verma of Patna University will see the light of the day. I only request the readers to forgive the errors and the lapses for which I own whole and sole responsibility.

*—Shankar Kumar Jha*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Thanks are due to the publishers and editors to the following Journals and Commemoration volumes from which I have collected my own articles for this publication.

1. Political Scientist, (Ranchi) for "Vidyapati's treatment of Diplomacy and Inter State relations" Vol. III, No. 2, 1967.

2. The Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal (Calcutta) for 'Usury in mediaeval Mithila based on Vidyapati's Likhnavali—1968-69.

3. Journal of Ganganatha Jha Research Institute (Allahabad) for "Vidyapati's Goraksha Vijay—a Socio-Political Study"—1967, January.

4. Journal of Post graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning (Darbhanga)—Vol II, Part I, March, 1966, for "A Study of Vidyapati's Dan Vakyavali".

5. Ramanath Jha Commemoration Volume (Darbhanga) for "Vidyapati's Ideal of Raj Dharma, 1968.

6. Tantranath Jha Commemoration Volume (Darbhanga) for "Vidyapati's Vibhag Sar", 1980.

The two pieces namely "on Nationalism" and "Vidyapati, the prophet of the Proletariat" are excerpts from my thesis presented to the Bihar University, Muzaffarpur.

—*Author*

## CONTENTS

# Vidyapati's Treatment Of Diplomacy And Inter-State Relations

DIPLOMACY is an instrument to further the objectives of State consolidation and State advancement. This approach definitely highlights variation of Policy relations to suit environmental dynamics of political situations. Kautilya had elaborated the ancient sixfold policy to provide the guidelines by which a State could be vell consolidated and evolve itself into a world power. Vidyapati followed the main principles of Kautilyan diplomatic formula to suit the requirements of the small power diplomacy as it obtained then during the period of political confusion and inter-State clashes of expansion. The kingdom of Mithila was itself a small kingdom and every ambitious and powerful ruler had displayed the natural instinct to expand the kingdom, or at least to free the kingdom of the stigma of a semi-sovereign state by throwing the yoke of the Sultan by diplomacy. Vidyāpati—who had lived long at the helm of public affairs—would have probably thought of enlightening his patron kings and their royal children on the course they should follow in the chess-board of inter-State politics. Both by his academic background by his study of the Artha-Sastra, the Kamandikya nitisar, the Sukranitisar, Lakshmidhar's Rajdharmakanda of Kryta Kalptaru and Chandeshwar's Rajniti Ratnakar as well as by his long experience of public affairs Vidyapati was eminently suited to give a word of counsel.

Vidyapati follows Kautilyan formula of advocating the policy of friendship and peaceful co-operation with States of equal status In peace diplomacy such treaties of friendship are assets to be prized above everything. This becomes all the more valuable if the State is in the grip of financial crisis or disloyalty of the army. In the "Tale of a man of good wit" Vidyapati clearly says "when a man's treasury hath become exhausted, when the army have been defeated and the servants

have become disloyal, then friendship with one well-born is to him as it were wishing tree of Paradise."[1] To the oppressed State, then, a bilateral treaty of friendship with a cognate State comes as a silver lining to a cloudy horizon. But Vidyapati is very cautious in the choice of such allies. He wants such treaties of friendship to be entered into only "if a man hath affection with another of equal rank, steadfast in deed, a hero high-souled and of a grateful nature."[2] In the Likhnavali[3] Vidyapati has given some practical examples of treaties of friendship between these small feudatory powers against the common enemy or the enemy of the allies where it is shown that the ally is prepared to arrange for the money needed to sue peace and for military personnel in case the ally wants to fight with his enemy.

"Peace is good but to appease the enemy for buying peace is bad." Vidyapati has echoed this age-old sound principles of international relations in the "Tale of a coward." "If a pacific king display not the power of his valour, and without fighting make peace, then to his foes doth he succumb. Enemies must be nipped in the bud or else they will ruin the kingdom."[4] How sound ! Those familiar with the tragic consequences of the Anglo-French Policy of appeasement under the imaginary fear of Soviet communism during the Interwar years will appreciate how the World could have been spared the Nazi menace and the consequent World War had the statesmen only cared to follow the dictates of Vidyapati.

Vidyapati was a stark realist even in inter-State relationship. He knew that to challenge the enemy was a desirable object but not in all the circumstances. Surrender may be justified when the calamity is irresistible but if one king has the capacity to meet the challenge he must meet it rather than surrender. In the "Tale of a coward" Vidyapati's advice is as follows: "In the face of an irresistible calamity resignation verily is wholesome; but, if he have the power to resist, a wise man cometh to action, nor wasteth he one moment in delay."[5] Being a wise practical minded statesman Vidyapati pleads for action and resistance on the part of a king if the king could for that



would save disgrace and dishonour. Surrender to a bigger power is, no doubt, advisable but only where there is no alternative left. Peace is costly and following the Artha-Sastra principles Vidyapati supports the contention that while suing Peace to avoid the wrath of the invading superior force great idemnity has to be paid. Possibly the system was a left over from the Gupta Policy where huge monetary idemnity or territory had to be offered to the other side to sue for Peace.

Vidyapati has also referred to the prevalence of this system in the "Tale of a Hero valorous" for he says "huge idemnity has had to be paid when one king wanted to seek peace with a more powerful king."[6] As a military strategist and conversant with the tradition of warfare Vidyapati advises that if the enemy to be encountered is of equal strength the king should himself lead the forces to the battle field if the opposing army is of an inferior court and less strong, the king could even appoint a deputy to lead his forces. In the "Tale of a coward" Vidyapati enunciates the strategy in clear and unmistakable terms; "it is only customary to appoint a deputy when it is a weak enemy that hath to be destroyed. If your foe be of power comparable to your own, then should you become eager for the fray yourself."[7]

Thus it will be evident that Vidyapati had nothing to do with either the "macht-politik" or "blitz Politik diplomacy" of the Germans or the "mobile diplomacy" of the Italians. His canvass was the small power diplomacy. He was faced with the practical question of how the rulers of Mithila should indicate their choice among the adjoining states, some of equal strength, some of superior and some of inferior, each, however, being a potential threat. It was as a guideline in the scale of preference that Vidyapati advised that Peace is the best for she hath her glories no less renowned than war. But peace may be costly. So appeasement Policy to buy peace has to be abandoned. Besides, to sue peace huge idemnity has to be paid which may affect the Artha or resources of the State adversely. So peace should be followed only when the opponent is much too powerful and it be well nigh impossible to

resist him. World conquest and World consolidation, the twin objectives of Kautilyan diplomacy were beyond the Political pale of Vidyapati. His patrons were petty Rajas, small Hindu chieftains, they were not "Chakravartis" nor could they aspire to be such. They were only concerned with the politics of survival and extension to neighbouring kingdoms of Bengal and Jaunpur. They had no ambition for World power. Nor had Mithila ever a tradition of an empire. That explains the brief treatment of diplomacy at the hands of Vidyapati and his obvious indifference to most of the lessons of Kautilya on this point. They were simply of no use to Vidyapati.

Ambassadors in the Inter-State relations :

In the ancient and medieval India inter-State relations were carried on through the instrumentality of the envoys. These envoys were designated then as the Dutas. These agents of diplomacy performed all the functions which modern ambassadors do. Like their western Counterparts ambassadors of India were of three kinds : (1) one who was vested with full discretionary powers, (2) one who had limited powers and was dispatched with a particular object in view, (3) one who merely carried a definite message. In Vidyapati's *Purush Pariksha* we come across the third type. In the "Tale of a Hero valorous"[8] it is shown that the Delhi emperor Allauddin sent one of his 'Duta' to convey to Raja Hammir Deva to surrender one general Mahimsah who had sought asylum in the court of the Raja after having fled away from the Emperor's court. Here it is clearly shown that the Duta as a mouthpiece of the emperor narrated all that was asked to convey namely that if Hammir Deva did not surrender the said general the Delhi emperor would attack him and ruin him. Here the Duta only carried a speific message and did not have the authority to use discretionary powet.

In the ancient and medieval inter-State law, corresponding to the present day international law, the person of the *Duta* was held inviolable. Whoever be a Duta he enjoyed the diplomatic privilege and the diplomatic immunity and his



person was held inviolable. Chandeshwars[9] who would have been the chief source of inspiration to Vidyapati, approvingly quotes Manu and Sukra in support of this principle of inviolability of the diplomatic personnel. This has been the accepted principle in all ancient civilizations. Fenwick writes that "the records of ancient China, India and Egypt show a respect for the person of ambassadors and for the sacred character of their office."[10] As the Duta was the mouthpiece of the mastere he was to be treated courteously. A king was never to take ill of what was said to him by the Duta. He could not be slain and, in fact, it was considered a great sin to do any harm to the envoy.

Vidyapati in the same story (Tale of a Hero valorous) shows that even though Raja Hammir Deva was infuriated by the message of the Delhi emperor conveyed to him through the latter's Duta he swallowed all his anger and pride and merely repeated the old inter-State law that "Envoy, thou art immune, else I would have been furious." Thus we find that during our period (medieval India) the principle of inviolability of person of the envoy was accorded a high place by the kings and emperors in their inter-State relations. The long Indian tradition on this point was too strong a force to have been ignored by the kings. "The ideal of righteousness in India was as much part of individual ethics as of diplomatic procedure. The monarch, king pin of inter-State relations, held diplomacy ethical and above the attributes of a mere weapon of State craft".[11]

1. Page 47 Grierson's Translation of Purush-Pariksha.
2. Page 47 Grierson's Translation of Purush-Pariksha.
3. A work of Vidyapati—A model of Letter-Writing in which we get material of contemporary age.
4. Page 29 Grierson's Translation of Purush-Pariksha.
5. Ibid Page 30
6. Page 15 Grierson's Translation of Purush-Pariksha.
7. Page 30 Grierson's Translation of Purush-Pariksha.
8. Page 13 Grierson's Translation of Purush-Pariksha.
9. Rajanity-Ratnakara, Published by Bihar & Orissa Research Society-Chapter on Doota (दूत).
10. International Law Page 459.
11. Indian Journal of Political Science Vol. XXIII No. 4, Article 'On some Reflections on Ancient Indian Diplomacy'.

# Vidyapati's Goraksa Vijaya—A Socio-Political Study

*GORAKṢA-VIJAYA* is one of the less known works of Vidyāpati. It is a drama. Thanks are to MM. Umesh Mishra and Dr. Jayakanta Mishra for getting a photostat copy of the manuscript which was lying in the Nepal Durbar Library for years and to edit it with a brief but informative Introduction. The editors have also given the facsimile plates of the original which help in deciphering the text. This editors got this rare play of Vidyāpati published as the last of the series of works of the *All India Maithilī-Sāhitya-Samiti-Granthmālā* in the year 1961 from Allahabad, the text being published at the Hindusthan Press and the Introduction at the Dominion Press. The MS. according to the editors, is dated Agrahana Śukla Ekādaśī La. sam 495 (=1614 A. D.). We have no information whether this manuscript is available elsewhere or whether it has been published from any other place. As such we have to depend exclusively on this.

Like Jyotirīśwara's play, this a regular Maithilī play, on the pattern of Sanskrit plays, where Sanskrit and Prākrit speeches and directions are given together with Maithilī songs. The subject-matter of the play is the famous story of Matsyendranātha (the preceptor of Yogī Gorakṣanātha) who was brought back to the path of Yoga by his disciple Gorakṣanātha and his friend Kannipāda. It thus forms in the Mithila tradition a part of the extensive literature of the Nātha cult. We know on the authority of Shri D. C. Sen[1] that the Nāth cult which originated with Mīnanātha and Gorakṣanātha had already an extensive literature in Bengal in the 13th century. Mr. Sen also believes that Nāthism contributed largely to the vernacular literature in its primitive stages; and chief among these contributions are the Mayanamatī Songs available to us from the different parts of Bengal in manifold forms. These songs originated in eastern and northern Bengal and were spread by the propounders of the Nath-cult over all parts of



India.[2] But though the Mayanamatī Songs traverse by far a wider field, the most strikingly significant note, however, of the Nāth-cult is to be found in the *Gorakṣa-Vijaya* itself. Though Mr. D. C. Sen considers *Gorakṣa-Vijaya* "a work written in Bengāli,"[3] we do not find any cogent proof to support this contention. The theme of the *Gorakṣa Vijaya* as found in Vidyāpati's Maithilī version and the "*Meena Chetna*" which the *Gorakṣa-Vijaya* in the Bengālī tradition is sometimes called are identical stories, yet the structure of the vernacular drama and the "balancing of the complication and solution" in the Maithilī *Gorakṣa-Vijaya* clearly show that it is altogether a different work. All that we can reasonably infer is that the popularity of the Bengālī *Gorakṣa-Vijaya* might have inspired Vidyāpati to write an original form of "*Nāṭaka*" with the same traditional theme of how Gorakhanāth redeemed his Guru Mīnanātha from the great spiritual degradation. In the Maithilī tradition Mīnanātha and Matsyendranātha are identical figures.[4] It is quite possible that Vidyāpati's receptive mind might have been inspired by the elevated and calm tone of Bengālī *Gorakṣa-Vijaya* and would have prompted the versatile genius to incorporate the Mithilā tradition of Gorakṣanātha in the same lyrical notes within the framework of a regular play.

For us this work is important for the sociological and political deductions and inferences which it directly and indirectly provides. What stirs our mind is the natural question as to why a *Smārta* traditionalist like Vidyāpati chose the subject of Gorakṣanātha whose date is sometimes placed in the 10th century A. D. or in the 11th century, or even in the 12th century or sometimes in the 13th.[5] To me the explanation lies in the fact that Gorakṣanātha was selected by Vidyāpati because Gorakṣanātha had turned a Śaiva from the Buddhist fold and thus endeared himself to the various sections of Mithila which were sick of the Buddhist creed and of its own rigorous code of discipline. It is a historically accepted fact that the roots of the Nāth Cult of Gorakṣnātha go to the Vrajayana sect of Buddhism.[6] Relying on the authority of the well known Tibetan Tārānāth, MM, Har Prasad

Shastri came to the conclusion that Gorakṣanātha was at first a Buddhist and then later on he became a Saiva.[7] That is why the Lamas of Tibet contemptuously look at Gorakṣanātha. This change of creed impressed the Hindu mind and the bulk of the Maithilas which had never accepted the Buddhist faith opened its arms in rapturous delight to sing glories of Gorakhnātha. This play also evidently sings glories to the Yogic feats of Gorakṣanātha who in the *Mahārāṣtra tradition* was third in the line of the Nāthas—the first Nātha being the Lord Śiva himself, who is called the Ādinātha, second was Matsyendranātha and the third was Gorakṣanātha. Śaivism was by far the most popular cult in Mithilā and through this play Vidyāpati tried to strengthen the Śaiva cult which was the most progressive cult and through which alone the lower castes could be liberated. Sri D. C. Sen also believes that Nāthism was a compromise between Śaivism and Buddhism.[8] The second reason could be that Vidyāpati who was himself one of the prophets of the unity of cults might have been inspired by the mysterious qualities of Yoga which was propounded by Gorakṣanātha to attain the supreme bliss and for which he had received encomium from the Muslims also. The Muslims who did not like idol worship and the multiplicity of many Hindu Gods were impressed by the simple Yogic technique to reach the ultimate reality. Thus, the Yogic path propounded by Gorakṣanātha sought to provide one common path for the Hindus as well as Muslims.[9] Another possible explanation is that Vidyāpati who was a man of the masses though he lived his own life in the aristocratic circle of the rulers of Mithilā, tried to reach through Gorakṣanātha's glories the uneducated masses amongst whom Gorakṣanātha had become quite popular. We know on the authority of Mm. Gopinath Kaviraj and the late Sir Ganganath Jha that "the system of mystic culture introduced by Gorakhnātha does not seem to have spread widely through the educated classes."[10] By inference, it can be deduced that it had become quite popular with the uneducated masses. So it is not difficult to surmise that Vidyāpati would have tried to reach the message of moral integrity, purity of conduct, chastity of



behaviour etc. to the masses who desparately needed it in an age of loose public morals. In this play we find an asceticism of a high order based on an observance of moral virtues.

Incidentally, the play can be construed as a subtle satire against the kings and princes of feudal India who were engrossed in erratic pleasures forgetful of their high kingly duties and powers. It is a direct dig at the feudal practice of too many ladies at the service of one feudal male ("*Bahul Kāmini Ekala Kānt*").[11] In Fol. 7 (Kha) of the text Vidyāpati has described in detail the amorous ways of the king. In bringing home the belated realisation in the heart of Matsyendranātha that he had lost so many powers, Vidyāpati indirectly wants to convey the reflection that in the feudal order many kings had lost sight of their real powers. Thus like the *Kirtipatākā*, this work of Vidyāpati is also full of the description of the royal pleasures and shows how in this courtly atmosphere the kings had forgotten their real *Dharma* or duty. On Fol. 5 (Kha) of the text Vidyāpati has on the other hand, distinctly said that kings should not throw to the wind their Dharma. He enjoins upon the kings to increase their material wealth but not at the cost of their Dharma—*Dharma Rākhi Dhana Bhariaen Bhaṇḍā*."[12] This fits in well with the ancient Indian political tradition where pursuit of Dharma or duty has been considered of paramount importance even for the kings. Dharma etymologically means *to hold*. It stands for that which upholds or holds together. The idea is to hold intact the specific spiritual force on which one's efficacy as a member of a particular social species depends. "In so far as the individual is a functioning component of the complex social organism, his concern must be to become identified with the tasks and interests of his social role and even to shape to this his public and private character."[13] Vidyāpati, in short, enjoins upon the rulers the philosophy of Duty in a Dharma oriented polity.

---

1. *Chaitanya and His Age*, p. 2.
2. *Ibid*, p. 3.
3. *Ibid*, p. 3.

4. Introduction to the *Goraksa-Vijaya* in English by MM. Umesha Mishra and Dr. Jayakanta Mishra. p. 2.
5. Rahul Sankrityāyan on the basis of *Ratnakar Jopam Katha* a book of Brajjain Suddhis places it In the 10th Century. Preface of गोरखबानी by डा० पीताम्बरदत्त बड़थवाल p. 20 हिन्दी साहित्य की भूमिका by डा० हजारी प्रसाद द्विवेदी p. 61. हिन्दी साहित्य का इतिहास p. 15. by Pt. Ramchandra Shukla.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
7. हिन्दी साहित्य की भूमिका by डा० हजारी प्रसाद द्विवेदी p. 61
8. *Chaitanya and His Age* by Dr. S. C. Sen, p. 2.
9. हिन्दी साहित्य का इतिहास, by पं० रामचन्द्र शुक्ल p. 16
10. *Saraswati Bhawan Studies* quoted in the हिन्दी साहित्य का इतिहास p. 17
11. *Bahula Kāmini ekala Kanta*
    *Kṛṣṇapati āela sahayana tanta.*
12. *Dharma rākhi dhana bharia bhaṇḍāra,*
    *Bhanai Vidyāpati kavi kaṇṭhahāra,*
13. *Philosophies of India* by Heinrich Zimmer, p. 151.

# Vidayapati's Ideal Of Rajdharma.

VIDYAPATI was not only a great poet, an immortal bard who sang songs of love and joy but was a great social reformer also. It has been my thesis that poet Vidyapati needs to be studied more as a political figure than mere literary. Nothing illustrates this better than his ideal of king and Rajdharma which is evident in the pages of his magnum opus, "The Purush Pariksha".

No study of Vidyapati will be complete unless a mention is made of the hallowed institution of Rajdharma. The concept of the Rajdharma was not a new concept in Vidyapati's India. The rich literature of Rajdharma is as old as the Indian history. In the Mahabharata[1] it has been declared that all sentient beings depend on the Rajdharma and the four ends of life are elucidated by it. This is made still more explicit in a further declaration of the Mahabharata that the safe-guarding of the duties of the four varnas (caturvarn yasya dharmasya raksa) is the king's dharma (rajnam dharmah). The comprehensive character of Rajdharma is emphasised in Bhisma's declaration that "all Dharma has entered into Rajdharma".[2] Dharma etymologically means to hold. Hold what ? To hold the order of the varna and ashrama in such a way that the fourfold objects of life are attained. This necessitates the existence of a supreme human authority supervising conduct and enforcing conformity by penalties. Upto this point both the Dharmashastra writers and the Arthashastra writers are agreed. Both accept the king i.e. the state and magnify the sovereign. The state i.e. the king, was brought into existence to end anarchy and to restore and maintain Dharma. All Dharma is within the ambit of the king's responsibility. As the duty can be discharged only by the display or by the use of the coercive power of the state, all Dharma becomes subject to the king's jurisdiction. Varna, Ashrama, Dharma, Danda—all are Inter-linked and all get a sanction from the Danda which the king holds. Needless to

say it is this principle of Rajdharma which has kept the body-politic and social structure intact in the long course of Indian history.

Vidyapati who was one in the long glorious chain of Dandaniti writers followed this tradition of making the Dharma Supreme and enjoining upon king to uphold the Dharma. In one story[8] of the Purush Pariksha namely the "Tale of a Contrite Prince" Vidyapati says that "Righteousness is the base of the rule."

To uphold the Dharma and to follow the ideals of an ideal kingly polity have been as much the interest of the philosopher Vidyapati as of anybody else. Following the ancient Indian Political tradition, Vidyapati identifies the interest of the king with those of his subjects Just as an expectant mother sacrifices her own desires and pleasures, lest they should be harmful to the child to be born, the king must sacrifice his own conveniences, inclinations and pleasures in order to be of the maximum help and service to his people, says Agni Purana.[4] The body of the king is not meant for enjoyment of pleasures ; it has to put up with great troubles and worries while carrying out the royal duty of protecting the subjects and fulfilling the Dharma, says Markandeya Purana.[5] Vidyapati also joins this ancient Indian Political chorus and stresses the need for a king who should look after his subjects as a father looks after the offsprings. "Parents, it be true, bring forth offspring but it is the king who maintaineth and protecteth them and therefore more than a father is a monarch to be honoured by his subjects."[6] The ancient Indian thinkers did not make the king an autocrat of the Greek or Persian type. It thrust very many exacting duties on the king to observe which the king was duty bound, it was a sort of sacred trust which he could not break. We learn from Vidyapati that "A king hath vowed to protect his subjects and that vow may never be broken, more specially when those subjects are Brahmans in misery and afflicted by disease."[7]

This preference for the special treatment of the Brahmins should not lead us to the conclusion that Vidyapati was



sectarian or showed any unwarranted regard for the upper class. The old political treatises have also given preferential treatment to the Brahmins. Chandeshwar, who was one of the ablest predecessors and an immediate source of influence on Vidyapati, has approvingly quoted Manu to support the contention that it is the paramount duty of the king to care for the Brahmins when they are afflicted by a disease.[8] And Gautama[9] roundly declares that the king "rules" everyone except the Brahmana. It is not a claim for imperium in imperis on behalf of a class, like that claimed by the Church in the Middle Ages. "India knows no such thing as the benefit of the clergy."[10] A king who well protects his subjects is entitled to the one-sixth of the "punya," the good virtue of the populace if the king serves the people well. Let us see how Vidyapati has approximated the ancient Indian ideal of kingship when he propounds the attribute of a perfect king, "skilful in the administration of justice, annihilating his adversaries, ruling the subdued and cherishing his subjects"

### The Character of the Mithila King

In Medieval Mithila at the apex of the structure of administration was the king. The king was not the sovereign in the Austinian sense but he was sovereign by the standard set forth by Chandeshwara.[11] He was no Samrata but only a Sakar Akara-King—a king paying tribute regularly or irregularly to the emperor. He used to possess a vassal status and was bound to pay regular tribute to the feudal overlord-the Sultan of Bengal or Jaunpur or to whichever Sultan he was under. Incidentally, the Mithila ruler did not enjoy complete independence or authority. It's true that the Mithila ruler—like the Hindu chiefs of the rest of India in this period—were mostly left in the possession of their states by the Muslim rulers. But they had a tendency along with other Hindu chiefs of the period to withhold tribute and to create trouble. The Sultans, however, succeeded in bringing them under control, partly by violence, and partly by conciliation. The medieval Mithila king was, thus alternatively a Sakar—and an Akara king depending on as to whether he refused regular payment of

tribute, which again depended upon the military strength of Mithila ruler vis—a—vis the Sultan. Such a concept of kingship was devised to fit in with the existing state of affairs where almost every Sultan had to undertake expedition against a recalcitrant ruler, Hindu chieftain.

### Vidyapati's Ideal of Kingship

The king was obviously the keystone of the Political arch. On him depended above all the weal and woe of the populace. For Vidyapati rightly held that "A common man with faults, by his own faults goeth only himself alone to destruction; but through the fault of a king, to destruction go all his subjects too"[12]. So the king must be ideal in every respect. How can the king attain that ideal perfection? The answer is by following the path of righteousness. Righteousness is the base of royal rule" declares Vidyapati. He advises, "O mighty king, seek thou righteousness. Righteousness is the base of royal rule. Or else what distinction is there between all common men and thee, a Lord of men?"[13] Emphasising the imperative necessity of the king's observance of the ideals of the kingly polity, Vidyapati remarks—"when a king, like an elephant blind with intoxication and in his insolence disregarding his driver's commands hath strayed from his kingly duty, without doubt he is naught but a robber."[14]

The biggest driver whose command the king must obey is the Dharma.

1. Sarvasya jivalokasya rajadharma parayanama.
2. Shantiparva—Sarvedharmah rajdharma Praristah.
3. Purusha Pariksha—Grierson's Translation. Page 133.
4. Quoted by Dr. A. S. Altekar in "State and Government in Ancient India", Page 98.
5. Markandeya Purana, 130—133.
6. Purusha Pariksha—Grierson's Translation—The "Tale of an Adept in the Vedas"—Page 78.
7. Ibid—"The Tale of Adepts in Book Lore", Page 73.
8. Rajniti Ratnakara. Page 55.
9. Quoted in the Introduction of Rajdharmakand of Kirtyakalpataru of Bhatt Lakshmidhara. Page 39.
10. Ibid.
11. Rajniti Ratnakara. Page 18.
12. Introduction of Varnaratnakara by S. K. Chatterjee and Babuaji Mishra.
13. Purusha Pariksha—Grierson's Translation—"The Tale of a Contrite Prince", Page 133.
14. Ibid.

# Politics Of Gift

## A STUDY OF VIDYĀPATI'S DĀNAVĀKYĀVALI

*THE DĀNAVĀKYĀVALI* is one of the well known smṛti works of Vidyāpati. Dr. Jayaswal in his catalogue of smṛti Mss. in Mithilā has fixed the date of its composition in 1425 A. D. Vidyāpati has no where mentioned the date of its composition. All that he says is that his patron queen Dhīramatī, royal consort of Mahārājā Narasiṁhadeva "Darpanārāyaṇa" of Mithilā wanted him to write this book on gifts quoting the necessary authorities on the subject. MM. Dr. Kane in his *History of Dharmaśāstra* has referred to one *Dānavākyāvalī* of Caṇḍeśvara; but we have not yet come across such a book by Caṇḍeśvara. Dr. Jayaswal also speaks of a work called *Dānavākyāvalī* by Vidyāpati's patron queen Dhīramatī, at whose command another work named *Dānārṇava* was also composed. Probably Dr. Jayaswal has been misguided. On the basis of the printed text published from the Victoria Press, Benares, (1805 through the munificence of the Vanailī Raj lady Smt. Pārvatī Devī, we are inclined to believe that Vidyāpati's patron queen did not write any work on gift and the *Dānavākyāvali* was only composed at her mandate by her Court Pandit Vidyāpati. It may be surmised that queen Dhīramatī would have tried to demonstrate her love and regard for the Dharmaśāstra in which the theme of gift occupied such a prominent place by getting a first class treatise written in which her name could have been associated. Mr. K. V. Rangaswami Aiyangar in his Introduction to *Dānakāṇḍa* of *Kṛtyakalpataru* of Bhaṭṭa Lakṣmīdhara belives "The founder of a dynasty, whose rise to supremacy is recent or whose pretensions to the throne or to Kṣatriya lineage are disputable, would try to show his zeal for upholding *Dharma* by arranging for the composition of a digest. An ambitious prince will now and then try to make up for his relative inferiority in the scale of rulers by undertaking the provision of a digest comparable with those

undertaken by rulers of the first rank.[1] That explains Maharani Dhīramatī's zeal for getting a standard treatise on the *Dāna* prepared by her scholar-statesman-cum-royal officer Vidyāpati.

The theme of the *Dānavākyāvali* is the gift. As we know the literature of gifts(*Dāna*) has great antiquity and its importance and underlying principles are recognised in Vedic literature. In the Ṛgveda there is a whole class of hymns known as *dāna-stuti*, in praise of gifts and liberality. The literature of *Dāna* even in its surviving form is of imposing extent. A great part of the *Anuśāsanaparvaṇ* of the *Māhābhārata* (Chapters 57-99) is devoted to it, while topics connected with *Dāna* are dealt in in other Pravaṇs. MM. Dr. Kane in his *History of Dharamaśāstra* where he refers only to the printed Purāṇas in which the topic of *dāna* is dealt with gives an exhaustive list. The list would be all the more lengthy if the unprinted Purāṇas in which the theme of '*Dāna*' figures were to be included. In the comparatively later period there was a wave of literature of gift, and we find in course of about four hundred years—from the tenth century to the fifteenth—a host of first rate smṛti writers giving masterly expositions round the theme of '*Dāna*'. May be the Brahmin *smṛti* writers—who were most likely to get advantage from the gift given as they were considered most fit to receive the gifts —had deliberately eulogised the virtues of gifts. The dominant class as the Brahmins were in the social hierarchy, this class might have deliberately manipulated the giving of gifts in such a way that even though economically backward they might have been compensated through the award of gifts. This incidentally repudiates the Marxist tenet that the dominant economic interest influences even the religious and social order. The way the socially predominant but economically backward Brahmin class exploited the religious aspect of Dāna to its advantage demonstrates that all that Marx has held about the supremacy of dominant economic class is not true. Another possible explanation can be on the lines suggested by Dr. Humayun Kabir. Dr. Kabir propounds the thesis that in a society which has no political or temporal strength



to meet the challenge of foreign faith and a foreign race, more aggressive than itself—gives in before the foreign power and to compensate for this defeat takes to other worldliness, to escapism from this mundane existence as a face-saving device. This, he believes is the real explanation of the overpowering tone of religious purity and the gift as a remedy for the ills of this world. No wonder there grew up a bulky literature on the central theme of *Dāna* during the period when Hindu India has been practically bowled out by the forceful bowling of the new faith of Islam and when the Hindu religious section was back to the pavilion it conceived of gifts and such other expedients which could assure better future in the next world. It was so to say in an attitude of compensation for the humiliation in the material field that the smṛti digest took seriously to the doctrine of gift and similar devices in the spiritual field.

That is why we find a plethora of books on *Dāna* beginning with the *Dāna-Kāṇḍa* of Bhaṭṭa Lakṣmīdhara's *Kṛtyakalpataru*. Mr. Rangaswami makes bold to say that 'this is no reason to believe that Lakṣmīdhara had any predecessor in the treatment of *Dāna* in a special treatise.'[3] Mr. Rangaswami then places the *Dānasāgara* of Ballālasenā written in 1168 A.D. which he considers to be 'the first considerable treatise on *Dāna* after the *Kalpataru*' This registers an improvement over the *Kalpataru* in as much as it contained a full treatment of the prayoga-mantras, arranged for each Vedic *śākhā* separately. Nearly a hundred years later Hemādri contributed to his *Caturvarga-cintāmaṇi* an elaborate section on *Dāna*. In Mithilā Caṇḍeśvara's name stands most prominently in the galaxy of the *dāna* writers. Caṇḍeśvara's *Dānaratnākara* is a classic in the Mithilā tradition. Though we beg to differ with Rangaswami's thesis that "Caṇḍeśvara builds his book around the core of Lakṣmīdhara's treatise on *Dāna* and that in doctrine and statement he adds little to the *Dānakalpataru*,"[4] yet we can concede that the line of treatment of Caṇḍeśvara's *Dānaratnākara* and Lakṣmīdhara's *Dānakāṇḍa* is identical. Caṇḍeśvara's cousin Rāmdatta wrote in the first quarter of the 14th century—a standard work—*Dānapaddhati* dealing

with the 16 mahādānas. Vidyāpati was the able and proud inheritor of this tradition. He followed the line of treatment on the subject of *Dāna* of all his predecessors in a partial way and added some original flashes which clearly show the democrat in Vidyāpati. This is what makes *Dānavākyāvali* of Vidyāpati such a significant book.

*The Dānavākyāvali* has departed from the traditional treatment on *Dāna* in two important respects. Unlike Lakṣmīdhara, Ballālasena, and even Caṇḍeśvara who might have come as immediate source of inspiration, Vidyāpati does not give any special treatment of the *mahādāna*, the great gifts which only kings and feudal lords could afford. He scrupulously omits from his list the *tulā-puruṣa-dāna* which we find in others who have treated of *Dāna* before Vidyāpati. He also refrains from mentioning such gifts as *saptasamudradāna* or *viśvācakradāna* which have been mentioned in other treatises on *Dāna*. This shows that the democrat in Vidyāpati was more concerned with the gifts of everyday use of the common man, the ordinary gṛhastha of his time, the basic sector of the community. This explains Vidyāpati's preference for the gift of such poor man's items as śākadāna,[5]a the fuel or *indhanadāna*[5]b or the *ikṣudāna*[5]c or the guḍadāna (molasses). This explains that Vidyāpati departed from the aristocracy-oriented approach to *Dāna* of Caṇḍeśvara and followed the plebian character which was no mean achievement in a feudal set up. In this he stands comparison with a Bengali writer on *Dāna*—Govindānanda Kavikaṅkaṇācārya, the author of the *Dānakriyākaumudī* who had openly omitted the *mahādānas*, though Vidyāpati could not go as far as his Bengali counterpart went in sidetracking the *mahādāna*. Even then seen against the backdrop of his predecessors and contemporaries, Vidyāpati could definitely be called a progressive thinker. It is for this reason that a Bengali scholar Śri Jayadeva Ganguly Śāstrī has given the compliment to Vidyāpati that no Maithil except Vidyāpati mentioned cheap articles within the reach of every purse.[6]

The second suggestive point in the *Dānavākyāvali*[7] is that though the philosopher has not completely omitted the



costly articles of gift from his treatment of the *Dāna*, yet the underlying justification is of a political nature. Vidyāpati was a political realist and not a mere utopian visionary. He was convinced that liberality of attitude of the prosperous and affluent sector of the society was a *sine qua non* of an equalitarian society. The equilibrium in a society in which the paramount duties of spiritual leadership and education rested on a small section of the people which was bound to render its services without demanding remuneration while economic and political influence as well as affluence went to the other sections. Necessitated liberality being inculcated as a matter of expediency. The aim of this costly gifts was to induce in the affluent classes a sense of their obligations to the distressed and the poor, to generate a feeling of reciprocal dependence in all classes of society. The fundamental idea underlying this approach is very much similar to Mahātmā Gāndhi's concept of the Trusteeship and Vinobā Bhāve's concept of the *Bhūdānā*. Just as Gāndhiji wanted to emphasise the moral necessity for the rich to consider themselves as the trustees of the wealth of the community to use it for the common good and Vinobā Bhābe emphasises the social imperative of voluntary parting with surplus wealth to share with the people in a spirit of *Dāna*, so also Vidyāpati mentioned the *Dāna* of costly stones like nīlā, gomeda, *markata*, *muktā*, he wants them to be given to those really deserving it, the most needy. As the Brahmins of tradition and profession were not to undertake material pursuits, it was the social and imperative necessity on the part of the have class to satisfy the material requirements of the Brahmin class to avoid a serious social catastrophe.

This approach can better be appreciated if we refer to the elaborate descriptions of the advantages accuring from the *bhūmidāna* (gift of land) and to many authorities quoted in the *Dānavākyāvali*—a feature in Vidyāpati which he shares with others of his kin. In historical times the gift which was most valued was that of land. As the donee, being a Brāhmaṇa would enjoy, even without express grant, immunity from taxation for it, and it would be heritable, it was much

esteemed. Land which passed into Brahman hands was like fiefs 'in mortmain' in medieval England.[8] Prof. R. S. Sharma though in a different context lends support to the view that land was given to the Brahmin as a gift by the kings and nobles was a sort of price to buy off the good will of the Brahmin class which alone could be possible contender of power in the society. "It was apparently not merely a religious obligation to grant land to the *Brāhmaṇas*, but also a political necessity, as would appear from the nature of grants, which were permanent fiefs not to be entered by the soldiers and officers of the king.[9] It is not unreasonable to suppose that similar political motive might have been at the back of Vidyāpati when he devoted so much space in quoting chapter and verse on the importance of the gift of the land.[10] Even stripped of its political significance the *Dānavākyāvali* is a standard smṛti work revolving round the theme of *Dāna*. It mentions he *Kalpataru*, the *Dānasāgara*, *Bhupāla Bhojarāja* nd the *Ratnākara*.

1. Page 8-The Dānakāṇḍā--Introduction I by K. V. Rangaswami.
2. Vol. I pp. 159-167-1930.
3. Introduction--I—K. V. Rangaswami—Page-71.
4. Ibid.
5. a. Page 191.
   b. Page. 241.
   c. Page 193.
6. BRORSJ Vol. XLVIII-Part 1--I—Mithilā Smārtas & Social Problems.
7. Dānavākyāvali-Page 38.
8. Introduction of D. K. of K. T.--Page 109.
9. *The Origins Of Feudalism In* India by Dr. R. S. Sharma.
10. Dānavākyāvali---Pages 144--156.
    Vijñānujñapya Vidyāpati kṛtinam sapramāṇamudārā.
    Rājñī purāthāvalokā viracayati navam Dānavākyāvalī sā.

# Economics of Rural Indebtedness

## USURY IN MEDIEVAL MITHILA BASED ON VIDYAPATI'S LIKHNAVALI

Likhnavali is one of those less known works of poet Vidyapati which is a faithful chronicle of the age. It throws immense light on the Socio-economic institutions of the medieval Mithila. The work is an exercise in models of letter writing in Sanskrit. It provides, according to one authority[1] models of 89 (eighty nine) letters in all—18 being forms of letters written by inferior to the superior, 28 models of superior writing to inferior and seven models of equal writing to equal, the rest being letters describing local usages and conditions. I gather from the Librarian of the Kamesh vara Singh Sanskrit University. Darbhanga that this book was printed during the last decade of the last century at the Union Press[2] Darbhanga. Unfortunately no copy is available there. Professor Ramanath Jha[3] has in his possession fragments of the book, beginning from page 25 with the middle of letter no. 38 to page 48 which ends at the middle of form no. 78. These pages were kindly lent to me by Professor Jha. The Bihar Rastra Bhasa Parishad, Patna, has got a transcription of the same book which seems to be genuine for the forms of letter given there tally with those in the printed fragments available with Professor Ramanath Jha. I learnt from the late Mm Dr. Umesh Mishra that he possesses the complete book. In fact, he has referred to the forms of letters in his book[4]. My own study is based on the copy of the Bihar Rastra Bhasa Parishad and the printed pages in possession of Professor Ramanath Jha.

### Treatment of Usury in the Likhnavali

In the Likhnavali we get a tell-tale picture of the economic institution of usury. Vidyapati in the Likhnavali has given some startling evidences of usury. He has used the term 'sodai' for with interest. In various letters he has shown that

usury backed by social usage and the gram panchayat existed with callous indifference of the state towards the institution. Loans were mostly taken for domestic urgency like daughter's marriage[6], for business investment[6] and for agricultural purposes.[7] Loans were to be advanced on the guarantee of the surety or surities. On the basis of one of his letters we get the picture of prevailing types of surety [8] They were of three kinds (1) *Darsakolagnaka* ( one who would undertake the responsibility to show or point out the debter not to pay in time) (2) *Pratykelagnaka* (one who would undertake the responsibility of getting the required sum recovered from the debtor) (3) *Dattrilagnaka* ( one who would agree to pay the required amount himself in case the debtor fails to pay). Incidentally this classification and this institution of surety which was accepted in Mithila was based on the *Sākshi-Prakaraṇa* of Yājñavalkya specially his *Mitākshra Bhasya* wherein is contained an elaborate treatment of this aspect of loans. That the rates of interest as well as the modes of payment were to be guided by the social usage and the council of the village elders who, alas ! were no less callous in accepting this institution can be inferred by two of the letters of the Likhnavali. In one letter[9] it is clearly mentioned that following the local customary practice ( Loka Vivahar Pariprapta Kala ) no interest was charged for the first four months following which interest at the rate of four *pannas* per *tanka* per month would be charged. In another the verdict of the Punchayat (Punchayat Nirnaya)[10] is quoted in support of the creditor which had ordered for the payment of the double of the principal amount lent to be payable to the creditor (Dwiguni kritrima). Loan transactions were expected to have the witnesses to testify the terms of the contract.[11] That cash loans would have been advanced against the cattle pledged with the creditor or against the gold and valuable metals can also be inferred from these letters.

In one letter one debtor is shown pledging his bullock, cow along with the calf to be used by the creditor with the creditor for the loan of three *tankas* only.[12] In another[13] one debtor is depicted as pawning ten *tolas* of gold for a loan of



thirty *tankas* at the interest rate of 4 *pannas* per *tanka* per month.

### Types of Loans and Interest

Exorbitantly high rates of interest were in vogue which can be proved by the various letters of the Likhnavali. The system of "*Sapadika*" mentioned in two letters clearly leads us to the conclusion that 1/4 of the principal amount lent was to be collected as interest next year.[14] The creditor would possibly have charged even higher interest rate if the debtors need for money would have been pressing for we find in one letter that a certain Brahmin took a loan at the rate of six *pannas* per *tanka* per month for his daughter's marriage.[15] Six *pannas* for each *tanka* per month was charged as interest.[16] No less exacting were the terms of the loan taken for the business purposes for in one letter we find the terms of the contract as one "*Shibaksh*" per *tanka* on the principal amount and three "*Shibaksha*" per *tanka* on the profit of the amount.[17] The different systems of payment of the interest such as '*Mola*' '*Khepi*' and '*Addhi*' used in the Likhnavali in connection with the various types of loan and their mode of payment all lead us to believe in the existence of usury. The creditor used to get kind payment by way of interest under '*Mola Vyavastha*' as we find in one of the letters wherein the creditor was to get ten '*Khari*' (little less than a maund) paddy at the time of the harvest against ten *tankas*.[18] Against a loan of three *tankas* only the creditor could get a cow whose milk he could milch and bullocks with which he could plough the land.[19] Thus it is evident that the debtors an average citizen in all possibility would always have been a debtor were exploited at the hands of the Shylock who used to get. so to say, every pound of flesh for the money lent.

### Negative Role of the States

Unfortunately the State did not think it its duty to control this serious economic malady. The State was obviously wedded to the concept of a negative state where it was only a passive onlooker of this institution of usury. Laissez-faire

attitude held the scene with the result that "where wealth accumulated men decayed". To those who may be inclined to disbelieve these examples of the Likhnavali as holding good for the entire geographical area of the Mithila or of the period as a whole, we can point out the statement of a famous contemporary Amir Khusroo. Amir Khusroo believed that "probably the interest on big sums was 10% per annum and 20% per annum on small sums[20]." That the state had maintained callous indifference to this evil socio-economic institution is also borne out by the history of the period as a whole[21]. In matters concerning money lending the state apparently had very little responsibility and interfered in extreme cases." The respect for free contracts probably kept back the state from interfering too often and too much in loan transactions. Another possible explanation could be that the state was indifferent to this question because the *Smriti writers* had sanctioned the various forms of the rates of interest which were in vogue then. The *Chukra-Briddhi* interest of which we get illustration in the Likhnavali was one of the six kinds of interests mentioned and approved in the legal works. The elaborate treatment given to the problem by Narada and Brihaspati can be presumed to have condoned usury as a necessary evil. But the consequences of the state apathy towards ever-growing indebtedness were disastrous.

---

1. MM. Dr. Umesh Mishra in Vidyapati Thakur—Hindustan Academy, Allahabad—1960.
2. This press was known later as the Darbhanga Raj Press.
3. The first Maithili representative of the Sahitya Academy. He was the head of the Deptt. of Maithili, University of Bihar.
4. Vidyapati Thakur—pp. 67-70—Hindustan Academy, Allahabad.
5. Likhnavali Letter No. 70 of the Likhnavali (Copy Bihar Rastra Bhasa Parishad & printed text with late Professor R. Jha )
6 *Ibid.*, Letter No. 71 of the Likhnavali ( Copy Bihar Rastra Bhasa Parishad & printed text with late Professor R. Jha. )
7. *Ibid.*, Letter No. 72 of the Likhnavali ( Copy Bihar Rastra Bhasa Parishad & printed text with late Professor R. Jha )
8. *Ibid.*, Letter No. 61 of the Likhnavali (Copy Bihar Rastra Bhasa Parishad & printed text with late Professor R. Jha. )
9. *Ibid.*, Letter no. 68 of the Likhnavali (Copy Bihar Rastra Bhasa Parisnad & printed text with late Professor R. Jha. )



10. *Ibid.*, Letter no. 66 of the Likhnavali Copy Bihar Rastra Bhasa Parishad & printed text with late Professor R. Jha.)
11. *Ibid.*, Letter no. 68 of the Likhnavali (Copy Bihar Rastra Bhasa Parishad & printed text with late Professor R. Jha.)
12. *Ibid.*, Letter no. 76 of the Likhnavali (Copy Bihar Rastra Bhasa Parishad & printed text with late professor R. Jha. )
13. *Ibid.*, Letter no. 75 of the Likhnavali (Copy Bihar Rastra Bhasa Parishad & printed text with late professor R. Jha.)
14. *Ibid.*, Letter no. 61 & 69 of the Likhnavali ( Copy Bihar Rastra Bhasa Parisad & printed text with late Professor R. Jha )
15. *Ibid.*, Letter no. 70 of the Likhnavali (Copy Bihar Rastra Bhasa Parishad & printed text with late Professor R. Jha.)
16. *Ibid.*, Letter no. 70 of the Likhnavali (Copy Bihar Rastra Bhasa Parishad & printed text with late Professor R. Jha.)
17. *Ibid.*, Letter no. 71 of the Likhnavali (Copy Bihar Rastra Bhasa Parishad & printed text with late Professor R. Jha.)
18. *Ibid.*, Letter no. 72 of the Likhnavali (Copy Bihar Rastra Bhasa Parishad & printed text with late Professor R. Jha.)
19. *Ibid.*, Letter no. 76 of the Likhnavali ( Copy Bihar Rastra Bhasa Parishad & printed text with late Professor R. Jha.)
20. Aspects of medieval Indian Culture by P. N. Ojha—150.
21. *Ibid.*

# Sociology of Bond Labour

## Slavery in Medieval Mithila Based on Vidyapati's Likhanavali

### Slavery an ancient institution

We gather from the works of Vidyapati that the institution of slavery was prevalent in the contemporary age. We get pointed reference about its presence in Likhnavali, Kirtilata, Purush-Pariksha and other works It is true "that slavery existed as an important element in the economic life of all nations of antiquity. "1 So also from the earliest times slavery existed in India. Like other countries of the ancient world India accepted the institution of slavery as a constant factor in the socio-economic structure. Throughout the entire period of ancient history the validity of slavery as a system of labour was never seriously questioned. "No attempt to abolish it was made by any ancient Govt., nor did any ancient religious body, even the christian church challenged the right of its believers to own slaves." 2 Even the most liberal Greek Political philosophy which discussed the institution of slavery discussed it only as to whether it was a condition grounded in natural law or made by man. That explains the elaborate treatment of this institution of slavery at the hands of Arthashastra writers like Kautilya and Smriti writers like Narad.

### Factors tending medieval slavery

The institution whose validity was never seriously challenged in the ancient India got a spur in the medieval period and we find the system conventionalised and sanctified by the state during the period of our author. Many factors might have contributed to the wide spread and varied forms of this practice. The medieval Indian politico-social structure was a feudal order which naturally upheld this institution in a sense the slaves in India during this period were the proto-



type of the serfs of the western feudal order. "The frequent feudal wars and raids must have resulted in the enslavement of the people of the country defeated or attacked. War brought to the victor not only slaves previously owned by the captives but also captives." 3 The deterioration in the general economic condition of the masses was another factor responsible for the increase in the number of slaves. Indebtedness which was a natural con comitant of a feudal economy caused by high degree of economic disparity often led people to sell themselves. During famines which were not rare in the period, people accepted slavery to maintain their lives. Besides natural calamities, feudal plundering would also have reduced people to dire straits. The depredations of the Muslims would have further contributed to the economic exhaustion of the masses. So far as Mithila was concerned almost all these factors would have operated in varying degree which was responsible for the presence of regular trade in slaves as is evident from the Likhna-vali and other literary sources. By Vidyapati's time the institution of slavery was so thoroughly conventionalised that we get in his Likhnavali set forms for recording the sale of the slaves. That such forms were quite common in every part of the Aryavarta is borne out by another monumental literary source Lekhapaddhati. 3A wherein also we get set forms of deeds of sales of the slaves.

### Slavery in Likhnavali

That there was a regular trade in slaves fully backed by temporal as well as scriptural authority is proved beyond doubt by various model letters of Vidyapati's Likhnavali wherein the detailed description of a typical sale-deed of slaves figures. The sale-deed used to specify the price of the slave or slaves sold, the physical complexion and age of the slaves, the specific works which they were contract bound to perform and the nature of the urgency which compelled a person or persons to be sold as slaves. 4 In these letters we find examples mostly of purchased slaves, the "Atmavikryain" as Arthashastra has termed it or Krityadas as Manu has

termed it. We do not come across other forms of slavery prevalent in the ancient India such as "Dhvajahrita" ( one captured in battle ) and the Udardasa" ( one who is born to a dasi from a slave ). Though Vidyapati has not used the terminology of either Arthashastra writers or the Smriti writers in connection with the sale of slaves we can infer from the letters of Likhnavali that a slave sold corresponded broadly to three classes of slaves mentioned by Kautilya namely Danapranita ( one enslaved for a fine or a court's degree ) the Ahitaka ( one enslaved for a debt or pledged ) and an Atmabi-kra in. In one letter we find an instance of one Rauta being called upon to pay off Govt. taxes or accept the term to serve on all week days against four rupya tankas, 5 In another letter another Rauta is shown selling his slave, a black complexioned forty-four year old fisherman by caste for six tankas and the slave's wife for four tankas, slave's son for three tankas and the slave's daughter for one tanka under some urgency. ( Chandya )6

### Difference with Arthashastra and Dharmashastra approach

Obviously the desperate economic condition of the low castes mostly the shudras might have compelled them to sell themselves or be sold by their masters to ward off starvation death or the wrath of the Govt. for non-payment of the dues. That shows the essentially economical character of this conventionalised institution. In this respect the particular type of slavery prevailing in the then society was basically different from the Arthashastra and Dharmashastra approach towards slavery. In modern phraseology we can state that the Arthashastra law insists in the main upon the principle of status by nationality and the Dharmashastra lay stress upon the principle of status by birth. 7 On the basis of the Likhanavali we can surmise that the Dharmashastra approach of slavery status jus sanguisins was absent for we find prosperous shudras bearing the title Rauta purchasing slave or even pawning the slavers in his possession. As the general condition of the Brahmins were no better than that of the poor Shudras we cannot conclude that the Brahmins



were always necessarily the purchasers. The Arthashastra distinction of Arya and non-Arya had almost vanished by Vidyapati's time and so we cannot infer that slavery would have existed on the principle of status by nationality. In an age when the general economic condition was pretty bad it was most natural that the sale and purchase of slaves revolved round the Cash nexus and had nothing to do with the principle of birth or nationality so far as slaves were concerned. It is a different thing that in no letter of the Likhnavali do we find any mention of the sale or purchase of a Brahmin.

### The sanction behind this institution

That the system had both governmental and religious sanction behind it can be deduced from two internal evidences. One is that in a typical deed of sale of the slave it used to be clearly written that the purchaser is empowered by the deed to extricate the slave even from under the throne of the king and bring him back to do the slaves' work again. 9 That shows that the contractual obligation relating to slavery did not run counter to the laws of the realm and on the other hand it had fullest temporal sanction because the king could not legitimately save the person breaking the terms of the contract. The second evidence is with regard to the witnesses who witness the deed of the sale of the slaves in many letters ( 56,57 ) witnesses figure. It is evident that no sale of human person would have been deemed legally complete unless some respectable and trustworthy witnesses did not justify their names as witnesses duly written on proper payment by the scribe by the consent of both the parties. This proves the element of social and legal approval attached to the institution. Incidentally the bonds of a contractual obligation used to be quite rigorous in those days and the Sakchins used to lend all the greater weight to it. Such a contract must have become all the more legally and morally binding by being witnessed, by being charged a fee ( probably payable to the state treasury ) and in its contents being written by one scribe who in all probability would have been an administrative person. In ancient Indian polity Kayasthas

werr generally the scribes who were employed by the state to write the deeds carefully.

### Work of the slaves

Relying exclusively on Likhnavali we can surmise that the treatment meted out to the slaves in Mithila was of a human character and they were generally not called upon to do many impure works. Broadly speaking they were made to do mostly odd domestic jobs like ploughing. fetching water, bearing palanquin etc. 10 and were like domestic servant always at the beck and call of the master serving his errands. In the earlier period ( the Arthashastra period ) slaves might sometimes perform work of economic importance such as agriculture. But in our period we generally find them as domestic servants, the Bahiya in the Mithila tradition. This contention that the slaves in the Arthashastra period were like domestic servants has also been upheld by Dr. Maiti 11 and Dr. Ashraff. 12 In this the slaves of Mithila of our period rather resemble those slaves mentioned by Narad who did pure works. According to Narad sweeping the gateway the privy, the road and the place for rubbish, shampooing the secret parts of the body, garhering and putting away the leavings of food, ordure and urine, rubbing the master's limbs when desired are the impure works to be done by the slaves. Of these impure works we find only gathering and putting away the leavings of food ( eating uchchista ) as one of the works which the slaves had to do on the basis of Likhnavali. 14 By and large the slaves in this part of the land would have spared the odium of doing those dirty and unmoral jobs which the slaves in the contemporary Muslim courts were called to upon to do. Though female slaves were sold in Mithila as is evident from the letters of Likhnavali we do not get any idea that they were meant for sexual enjoyment of their masters or they had to do such immoral jobs as shampooing the secret parts of the body. This can be explained by the chaste moral standards which held sway in the contemporary Mithila society. The Puritanism of the Pandits had not yet touched that low ebb in which they



would have imitated the Muslim nobles by making the slaves to do all sorts of immoral jobs.

### General conditions of the slaves

What was the general conditions of the slaves? One author 15 believes that "in respect of the position of the slaves the early medieval period has to be regarded as an age of decline". We find a definite deterioration in the standrad of values, a worsening of the plight of the slaves and an increase in the number of slaves. An exclusive reliance on the major work 16 of this period or on the legal works of this period would give the impression that the slaves were well treated and enjoyed a respectable status. This might have been true of the slaves who were new converts from Hinduism to Islam or those Muslim slaves who were employed in the royal or aristocratic households. But the condition of the slaves of Hindu religion, specially in Mithila was not satisfactory. A study of Vidyapati Likhnavali would show that the slaves were only hewers of wood and drawers of water who did not enjoy any real freedom of their own. The slave has very few rights in law for he was not his master. He was little better than his master's chattel. The master had the right to recover him if the runs away or give him to another man. Like the Greek, the Mithila tradition also accepted slaves as the property hence the legal object. He could be sold or mortgaged or his services leased. He was also, however regarded as a legal subject, a man as well as a thing. In Likhanavali we get the impression that a slave was sold for good till the moon and sun lasts and that he could be brought back from under the throne of the king to resume his slave's job. He was to be given only one square meal a day. From the letters it is evident that the slaves were sold for a paltry some for the whole life; an able-bodied slave male aged 44 is shown as being sold for 6 tankas, fair complexioned thirty years old female slave for four tankas, the 10 year old son of the slave being sold for three tankas. In another letter another slave is shown as being sold for two rupya tank. In yet another

letter 21 a slave is shown being pledged to a creditor who has paid him four rupya tanka to do all sundry household acts without cloth and wages on all week days. The person pledging the slave to the creditor was liable for act of good faith on the part of the slave and was to pay six kakins per day in case of any breach on the part of the slave or of the contract. 22 What is worse, even those poor slaves were made to share the fees of the scribe and the charge for "Gotra-Gotra Nibarkan", we get reference to the fee for this "Gotra-Gotra Nibarkan" in more than one letter of the Likhanavali. The persons standing surety for the observance of the contractual obligation were legally liable for fine and interest on fine in the case of the failure of the contract and so they must have seen the slave work according to their own satisfaction as well as the satisfaction of the master who bought or accepted as a bond.

### System of manumission

The man sold or pledged as a slave could claim manumission on certain conditions. A slave could free himself on paying his price to the master; a captive of war slave could free himself on paying half the ransom; a person enslaved for his failure to pay a fine could become free by paying the fine or by putting in some service in exchange. Sometimes manumission could be obtained as a reward granted for faithful service. In the Likhnavali we come across the example of manumission of a slave at the hands of his Brahmin master who pleased by the services rendered by the slave grants him freedom to go anywhere & to accept any job without any let or hindrance. Though not explicitly mentioned we can infer about the presence of the institution of the manumission by way of paying the fine or putting in some service from the various models of the sale deeds of the slave scattered in the letters of the Likhanavali. Probably the existence of slaves through captives of war was not known to Mithila of those days. Like the Greek masters the Brahmin or other high caste masters of the slaves might have granted manumission as a reward for the faithful services.



### Consequences of the institution of slavery

To sum up, Vidyapati furnishes in the Likhnavali, Kirtilata and other works the proof that the institution of slavery was rampant on a large scale in the then Mithila with inevitable disastrous consequences. In a slave holding society, as Nieboer finds the ruling classes having learned to command and domineer over their slaves, got used to highly undemocratic ways of life which is prejudicial to the social well-being of the society. It creates in the long run an offensive and brutal upper class on the one hand and a bitter and vindictive lower class on the other. Similarly a long tradition of slavery creates a set of persons born to work that others may not work and another set of persons to think that others may not think. Another obvious inference from this unhealthy division of classes is that manual labour becomes identified with slave labour and therefore discredited. Thus we explain the aversion of high caste Maithils to manual labour on account of this institution. Slavery prevalent on a large scale often encouraged harshness. It had the inevitable tendency to demoralise the slaves. Incidentally it prevented the sense of human dignity which lies at the foundation of morals. All these evil consequences did appear here in Mithila also and the trail have been casting their shadow till very recent past. We have not yet fully overcome the evils which have crept in the social structure on account of this feudal institution. The built-in prejudice against the upper class visible in the behaviour of the Shudras bears it out.

1. Encyclopaedia of Social Science Vol. XIV, page 73-77.
2. The Economic life of Northern India in Gupta period by Sachindra Kumar Maity—Page 148.
3. The Economic life of Northern India by Lallanji Gopal—Page 71.
4. Letters 55—59, Likhnavali.
5. Likhnavali—letter No. 57.
6. do letter No. 55.
7. Studies in Indian History & Culture by U.N. Ghosal P—473.

8. Letter No. 55.
9. Letter No. 56.
10. Letter No. 55 & 58.
11. The Economic Life of Northern India, Page 148
12. Life and conditions of the People of Hindusthan ( 1200-1550 A.D. ), Page 188—89.
13. Narada V-5-7—also quoted by Dr. Maity.
14. Letter No. 55.
15. and 16. Lallanji Gopal—The Economic Life of Northern India, P—71. by G. H. Jha.
17. Letter No. 55.
18. Letter No. 58.
19. Letter No. 55.
20. Letter No. 56,
21. Letter No. 57.
22. Labour in Ancient India by K. M. Saran, Page 29.

# Vibhaga-Sara

### Our Source and the Nature of the Book.

The Vibhaga-sara which literally means the essence of partitions is an important Smriti work of Vidyapati. This is one of his mature works possibly written at the fag end of his career. Mitra and Mazumdar[1] are inclined to believe that this work would have been completed during the period 4130--1460 A. D. in which two other Smriti works namely 'Danavakyavali' and Durgabhakti-Tarangani were also composed. Prof. Ramanath Jha[2] also supports this contention and believes that Vidyapati would have been near about 70 years of age when he was commissioned to undertake 'Vibhaga-Sara. Though as yet this rare Smriti work of medieval Mithila had not been printed. Its manuscript is reported to be in the possessions of many persons[3]. I personally have had the privilege of going through and using two manuscripts[4] though they do not tally into but together they provide a workable base to know the main idea of the book and ascertain the probable date of its composition. This book dealing with the theme of the laws of inheritance and partition was written at the mandate of king Narsingh Deva who bore the 'Biruda Darpa-Narayan'.[5]

### Vibhaga-Sara as juristic work :

It is a treatise on law. It is a standard reference work on the 'Dayabhag'. It centres round the question of the partition of the wealth and the question of succession. It is significant that the treatment of "Daya" and the "Vibhaga" was a common practice with the 'Nibandhakars of Mithila during the medieval period. Chandeshwar's 'Ratnakara' had set a very high standard of scholarship in this field, Vachaspati Mishra's 'Vyvaharacintamani' though not a very original work because it continued to a large extent the views of Mitakshara[6], nevertheless, had exhaustively treated this topic. Another

Mithila 'Nibandhakar' Misaru Misra who is placed between 1436 and 1515 A. D.[6] in his .Vivadachandra' had dealt with it. Vidyapati falls in line with this tradition of medieval Maithil. 'Nibandhakars' and treats the 'Dayabhaga' which entitles him to a high place amongst the jurists of medieval India. There are ten 'Prakarans' in all in this work and they cover a wide range but it appears that Vidyapati had devoted maximum attention to two aspects of this treatise. 'Stri Dhana' and 'Abhijya' that is which type of property is indivisible and whether the estate of the Mithila Raj was partable or not.

**Political why of 'Stri-Dhana' Treatment :--**

How to account for these two aspects receiving preferential treatment at the hands of Vidyapati ? So far as the reason for elaborate treatment of 'Stri-Dhana' is concerned it may be accounted due to the overpowering influence of Vijnaneshwara, a celebrated author of 'Mitakshara'. He was "the first social reformer of the medieval era who attempted to emancipate Hindu women from the shackles of their perpetual tutelage[7]. It is generally admitted that Vijnaneshwara removed the bar generally prohibiting women from inheriting as heirs to the property of their male relations and by laying down liberal rules whereby all property acquired by a Hindu woman by any legitimate mode became her separate and absolutely owned property. Vidyapati who was himself a great social reformer and an ardent advocate of the rights of women was naturally impressed by the doctrine of the 'Stri-Dhana' according to 'Mitakshara'. That is why he dwelt at length on that aspect of law in the Vibhaga-Sara.

**The Politics of the Impartibility of the Estate :**

Why did Vidyapati treat the royal estate of Mithila as impartable ? The reasons are purely political. That makes Vibhaga sara more a political tract of the time couched in the language of a Jurist within the general framework of Smriti work motivated by secular political considerations. Kingship, they say, knows no kingship. This truism was all the more applicable to the conditions of medieval political India where in the absence of a clear universally accepted



principle of succession wars for the kingdom and fratricides and patricides were quite common. The ancient Indian thinker Bharadwaja [8] had suggested long ago that the royal children have the extra-ordinary filialknack swallowing their male beggtters. Even Kautilya was seized with this problem in his chapter on 'Rajputra-Rakshanam' and had enjoined upon the king to protect himself and the kingdom from his wives, enemies, intimates and princes [10] In the context of Vidyapati's Mithila we know that in the oinwar dynasty of Mithila rulers such wars of succession to the throne of Mithila were not uncommon.

Tripura Singh alias Jagat Khan (eldest son of Raja Bhava Singh) and his son crowned prince Arjuna Singh (described in Vidyapati's 'Kirtapataka' waged a war and possibly managed to get Raja Ganesvara killed with the help of Muslim noble Arslan (as described in the 'Kirtilata'). The Bhagirathapur inscriptions [10] clearly prove that struggle for succession and consequent conflit and machinations had Characterised the kith and kin that is the probable heirs of the Oinwar dynasty for three generations which were ultimately ended by the tact and modesty of Rani Anumati who was the daughter-in-law of Raja Bhairava Singh and mother of Kansa Narayana. It was this setting of scramble among princes of the Oinwar dynasty in which veteran scholar, statesmen-Jurist Vidyapati was commissioned for the same person by Darpa Narayan [13] to write a legal tract upholding the principle of impartibility of the kingdom.

The geneological table on the basis of the Maithili Punji as verbally explained to me by Prof. Ramanatha Jha, who is an acknowledged authority on this Maithil institution of Punji, shows that after the death of king Dhira Singh a kingdom passed not into the hands of his sons but to the younger brother Bhairava Singh and his sons, though Vira Singh had a number of sons. This must have naturally enraged the sons of Dhira Singh who would have tried all disruptionist tactics to divide the kingdom. The kingdom was threatened with dismemberment. The grand father of

the reigning king Darpa Narayan could not tolerate the partition of his kingdo n, before his eyes. He wanted to save the estate being partitioned. This could have been possible only when the principle of impartibility of the estate of Mithila's ruling dynasty was proclaimed by an authority which could command universal respect. Vidyapati, the faithful ministerpandit-jurist and well-wisher of the royal house now bent with age was thought the fittest person to declare the legal impossibility and practical undesirability of the impartibility of the Mithila estate. Vidyapati was, therefore, commissioned in his ripe old age to pronounce in the Vibhaga-sara that the ordinary principle of partition applicable to the general citizen ary did not apply to the estate of Mithila rulers. The estate was impartible.

Vidyapati was not the first to be commissioned for such a task. Vidyapati's predecessor and grand father in the degree of relationship, Chandeshwara was also commissioned by king Bhavesh to write his political magnum Opus 'Rajnita-Ratanakara' to Justify a political expediency of the time. He had to Justify in the interest of the patron king that even semi-sovereign Brahmin king paying taxes to the superior overlord was entitled to the throne as a sovereign ruler. The traditional Dharama Shashtra rules debarring a Brahmin to kingship were coming in the way. Chandeshwar came to the rescue and in his 'Rajnita-Ratnakara' propounded the theory that even a Brahmin with a semi-sovereign status had legal and moral right to get the throne.

This example illustrates that the practice of commissioning old venerable legal and political luminaries of the land to justify practical expediency was not unknown. Vidyapati at the ripe old age by quoting eminent authorities saved the Mithila kingdom by declaring it to be an importible estate. Vidyapati quoted in particular his able predecessor minister-cum-'Smritikara' Vireshwara's 'Niti-Sara' who in turn had profusely borrowed from famous Narad Smriti in support of his contention that the ordinary law of partition was not applicable to the estate of the Mithila dynasty. It should be



recalled that by this legal pronouncement Vidyapati saved the political dismemberment of the kingdom and the partition of the estate. This was no mean achievement. It required a statesman's vision and a jurist's legal knowledge to bring to the rescue of the estate of Mithila. Even that doyen of the Maithil political thinkers Chandeshwara had not dared pronounce the estate impartible. Vidyapati thus served his patron house of Oenwars by avoiding it from going to pieces when the sons of Dhira Singh had threatened to divide the estate. We are stressing this point to prove that it was not the religious motive as such but the political motive of preserving intact the estate he had faithfully served for decades. In this respect there was a touch of political expedieney about it.

It thus comes in the category of Bollingbroke's 'Patriot king' which was occasioned by the political expendiency to justify George III's attempt to side tract minister's advice. It belongs then to a class of political literature which owes its birth with a political motive. Vidyapati in this capacity joins the rank of Locke, Hooker, Helmer and Bollingbroke. But that does not take away the legal weight of the arguments advanced in favour of the principle of impartibility of the estates of the ruling houses of Mithila. These still hold good. In our own time we have seen the royal house of Maharaja of Darbhanga as an impartible estate.

1. Vidyapati's Padavali—Bhumika Page 49.
2. Introduction of the Kirti—late in the Press.
3. (a) Pt. Lakshmi Kant Jha Ex. C. J., Patna H. C.
   (b) Pt. Khastinath Mishra of village Lalgunj, Darbhanga.
   (c) Bihar Rashtrabhasa Parishad, Patna.
   (d) Prof. Ramanatha Jha.
   (e) In the house of late Pt. Shivanandan Thakur.
4. (a) In the possession of Pt. L. K. Jha, Now being edited by mr. Soni I. C. S.
   (b) In the possession of Prof. Ramanatha Jha.
5. Ludo Rocher 'Studies in Law' ( Patna Law College Commemoration vol. Page—383.
6. Pandit Lakshmi Kant Jha Ibid Page 414.
7. V. V. Deshpande 'Studies in Law' Page 330.
8. Essentials of Indian Estate Craft-by T. N. Ramaswamy Page—18
9. Ibid.
10. Dated Lakshman Sambat 294 in praise of Anumati Devi where it is inscribed.
    Bhagirathipur is near Pandaul in old Darbhanga district and its photostate copy was published in the C. M., College Magazine.

# On Nationalism

Nation and its derivative Nationalism are such terms of Political Science as defy straight definitions. Mr. Benjamin Akzin means by nation a certain type of an ethnic group and of relations based thereon.[1] Mr. Akzin prefers to use the term ethnic to describe a nation because the term ethnic is more neutral and freer from emotional overtones of approval and disapproval. The essence of a nation, then, for Akzin is similarity and dissimilarity pattern. If a group most members of which are relatively similar in certain respects to one another, while being dissimilar in these respects from most members of other groups, there is an ethnic entity which can be called a nation, but that's not all. Size is equally important aspect of the phenomenon. "Where no sufficient communication has developed within a given region to result in a pattern of considerable cultural similarity, we say that the people of that region have not yet coalesced into a nation[2]"

Zimmorn, who has studied the problem of nationality at great length[2A], also lends support to the view that the essence of a nationhood is the feeling of unity among a group of people along with the feeling that group is centrally different from the rest of mankind. In short, the members of a national group recognise their likeness and emphasise their difference from other man. The idea of nationality is essentially based on similarity and dissimilarity of central ethos. It implies a sense of special unity which marks off those who share in it from the rest of mankind. As Zimmern has put it "it is a from of corporate sentiment of peculiar intensity, intimacy and dignity related to a definite home country[2B]."

## MITHILA-A NATION

Judged by the above criteria Mithila of the 15th century can be called a nation. The bulk of the age in question exhibited a sense of cultural affinity among themselves and they were differentiated by adjoining social groups on grounds of cultural characteristics. The channel of communication



was sufficiently developed in that geographical region resulting in a pattern of considerable cultural similarity. The cultural ethos had appeared making a feeling of oneness among the group and difference with the rest of the social groups.

Peaceful by disposition and religious by tradition, the Maithilis were a sort of distinct cultural entity by themselves. Their dress, food, way of behaviour, nay culture was all its own markedly distinct and different from the rest of the land. It is not insignificant that because of its unique cultural glory it could preserve intact its way of life even during the Turko-Afghan period. While the whole of the Gangetic valley was submerged by the flood of Turk-Muslim invasions, the small Hindu principality of Tirhut, the far famed Mithila or Videha of old, kept itself afloat like a tiny island in the sea. Even with the fast growing process of Urbanisation and assimilation in the modern era, Mithila is able to preserve her distinct cultural entity which shows how strong the bonds of nation have been and still are.

## Nationalism in Mithila

Though Mithila of Vidyapati had crystallised into an ethnic group to deserve the epithet nation, the note of nationalism as a mark of cultural glory was not visible when vidyapati entered the scene. "Nationalism in its broader meaning refers to the attitude which ascribes to national individuality a high place in the hierarchy of values[3]." Though nationalism in this sense of the term is a modern movement because it was only at the end of the 18th century that nationalism began to become a generally recognised sentiment moulding public and private life, yet "attachment to the nation soil, to parental conditions and to established territorial authorities have been known throughout history[4]." Strong indications of nationalism are evident among ancient Jews and Greeks. Akzin opines that by the ninth century nationalism begins to show signs of a revival and starts leaving its marks anew-it had died without disappearing altogether in historical records.[5] By the 15th century nationalism in the sense of

cultural revivalism and ethnic glorification had appeared. It has been noticed that in many cases poets and scholars have emphasised cultural nationalism first. They reformed the national language, elevated it to the rank of a literary language and delved deep into the national past, thus preparing the foundations for the Political claims for national statehood soon to be raised by people in whom they have kindled the spirit of nationalism.[9] Vidyapati's nationalism falls precisely in this class of cultural nationalism.

### Language—The Tool of Nationalism

"The mother tongue represents the most suitable expression of spiritual individuality." The development of Philosophy since the middle of the 18th century cannot be understood without this basic supposition according to which language is represented as the key to the most essential characteristics of a people and its culture. Vidyapati, therefore, chose the mother tongue of the majority of the population as the vehicle of communication to reach as many people as possible. Vidyapati knew too well that a people not only transmits the store of all its measures through the vocabulary of its language, but in syntax, word sound and rhythm, it finds the most faithful expression of its temperament and general emotional life.[14] He, therefore, sang the glory of the language of the land—Mithila. "One's own tongue is dear to everyone.[15]" ( Desil Bayena Sabh Jana Mitha ), sang Vidyapati in praise of the local tongue.

In his Padas (Poems) which have immortalised Vidyapati and through which he attempted communication at various layers of intellectual and cultural attainment—Vidyapati used the Maithili language of the unsophisticated type. A strong base of nationalism was possible only when the medium of communication was such as could reach the masses. A language of a minority group, having class overtones about it, could not bring about the desired degree of social cohesion. Nationalism implies a social unity, a common outlook and common vehicle of expression of community of mores.



### Sanskrit—Language of the Elite

Unfortunately, no language other than Maithili, could work as a social cement. Sanskrit with its subtle inflections conveyed a sense of almost florid sophistication.[9] One great fault of Sanskrit language was that the scholars neglected the world of nature and reality.[10] Another fault was that society began to identify the educated man with the classical scholar.[11] This tended to create a sense of inferiority complex in the majority of the population as they did not know Sanskrit. Like Latin in medieval Europe Sanskrit had become the classical language in India from 400 A.D. onwards. This language was mastered by and used only by the upper echelons of society. The great bulk of the community had no access to this language. It was a language of the classes, not of the masses. So far as the women folk were concerned excepting the women of the upperstrata or ladies of the cities, Sanskrit was not understood or adopted by the general mass of contemporary women. It has been accepted now that "Hindu educators did not realise the importance of making the different vernaculars the medium of instruction and of providing a literature in them.[12]"

### Maithili—The Mass Media

Maithili, on the other hand, was the language of majority. It was the common channel of mass communication. Maithili being simple, musical and direct was obviously the language spoken and understood by all—high and low, town bred and village bred, Pundit or the ignorant. It is true that Vidyapati was not the first to try his handover the Maithili language. Others before him had used it but not with that avowed object of forging a sense of unity or as skilfully as Vidyapati did. Jyotirishwar's Varna Ratnakara was more an example of Tatsam oriented Abhatta, rather than common Maithili of popular form.

Vidyapati in his Padavalis used a Maithili which even a cowboy could understand. As these Maithili Padas ( Poems ) numbering hundreds were imbued with Sanskrit imagery, mostly borrowed from Geet Govinda of Jayadeva their

appeal extended also to the learned. Vidyapati, thus, forged a cultural oneness by adopting Maithili as a convenient tool of mass communication. It is a common place of Political sociology that an ethnic group, being in the main one in which intense social communication has produced a community of mores, a common language representing as it does a prime vehicle of communication, plays a predominant role.[18] The rare cases wherein a people has retained its individuality despite the absence of common language do not disprove the conviction of a people that they are defending in language the very corner stone of their national existence.

The indispensable role of the common language during the formative period of the ethnic group was constructively utilised by Vidyapati in popularising the Maithili the "Desil Bayna". It was through the Maithili Padas (poems) that Vidyapati has helped us preserve all higher forms of cultural and spiritual life, the science and literature. Even today when the bonds of cultural unity are fast disintegrating it is Vidyapati's political prescription of cultural unity through Maithili language which holds the territory united. Vidyapati in this respect was a great unifying force through the medium of common language. In this role, Vidyapati stands a favourable comparison with Dante. The medieval Italian thinker Dante—who was also a great poet like Vidyapati and was his contemporary had chosen the Italian language in preference to classical Latin. His object was to reach greater number of people Vidyapati inspired and motivated by similar purpose used Maithili to forge the strong bonds of cultural nationalism.

### Nationalism—Through Natural Symbols

*Vidyapati, Tagore & Iqbal.*

History of Indian National movement in particular and the process of growth of nationalism in general lends support to the view that patriotic sentiments have been successfully evoked by stimulating positive response through glorification of national sights and sounds. It is said of Tagore that he won Bengal by his poetic enthusiasm for the natural scenery



of our countryside. His poetic idealisation of the beauties of rural Bengal, its rivers, rivulets, flowers and fruits endeared him even to ordinary household of Bengal. So did another Indian poet of genius and a prophet of nationalism-Iqbal who also sang glories of the Indian mountains like the Himalayas and the Indian rivers like the Ganges. Though both Iqbal and Tagore belonged to the elite group and were steeped in the best elements of western culture yet they were hailed in their own days and are still held as great national bards.

Vidyapati centuries earlier than these two poets of nationalism adopted the technique of glorifying the natural sights and sounds of Mithila to evoke responsive nationalist chords. He was soaked deep in the soil. In his Padas (Poems) we find references to the fruits and flowers of Mithila so that throught these cultural symbols the patriotic fire may be fired—Mangoes, Guavas, Lotuses, Lilies, nay the flowers and fruits of the Countryside of Mithila. He talks of the rivers which pass through the geographical area of the belt we associate with Mithila, of the typical flora and fauna of the land. The best way to touch the innermost chord of one's heart is through the instrumentality of local objects, focussed as cultural symbols.

The last nationalist upsurge evident in the country following the chinese aggression on India in 1962 was marked above everything else by an accent on symbols of Indianhood through the medium of mass communication. Through the A.I.R., films, newspapers, periodicals, we found the Indian nationalism asserting itself by pointing out the might of the Himalayas, the purity of the Ganges, the depth of the Indian ocean and so on. In the 15th century it was all the more creditable on the part of an Indian leader to have used these symbols of cultural glorification to unite the group and make it strong and stable.

### Vidyapati and Bankim Chandra Nationalism of Military Glory

An assertive nationalism has not unoften to adopt a militant note to command the necessary response. Such a

note need not necessarily have a Jingoistic tinge. If poets and literary men are to propound and propagate the consciousness of national glory they may take recourse to symbols and image to communicate the desired response. We can cite the illustration of Bankim chandra Chatterjee, one of the early nationalists of Bengal who in his Ananda Matha and Kapalkundala used the invocations of Goddess to rouse the martial qualities of a nation in deep slumbers. "Bande Mataram", which inspired millions of our countrymen in this century to fight the British imperialism and stake everything which one holds dear to free the mother from the bondage, was prayer of Bankim to Goddess Durga. She is symbolised as an incarnation of the might of the nation and invoked to shower her blessings on the countrymen to fight out the demonic elements.

In Vidyapati we find a similar note. He has written many verses in praise of Goddess Durga, the deity of might and virtue, who is symbolised as a force to drive the alienic demons out of the land. While praising Goddess Durga he has selected those aspects of her beauty and form which may inspire the cultivation of military qualities and martial virtues. It is Her prowess to kill the demons and to usher prosperity to the land that is highlighted. It's significant that of Vidyapati's religious works there is one complete work devoted to the worship of Goddess Durga which is called "Durga bhakti Tarangini[14]" in which the image of Goddess is painted with the arms, weapons, shield, naythe whole military equipments of the contemporary age. If we analyse these poetic symbols of militantancy glorifying of the Goddess, we can surmise that these stand for the invocation of Durga to stir the countrymen to the depth to fight the foreign element in their cultural and political set up.

To sum up, Vidyapati like Bankim Chandra of Bengal tried to rouse patriotic feelings by adopting the symbolic 'Goddess' to invoke the qualities of head and heart of the cultural group struggling for its soul The foreign cult of



Islam and the political tutelage of the Sultan were to be removed by inculcating the martial qualities of the nation. Vidyapati was the arch priest in the temple of Goddess Durga to invoke the same qualities which Bankim Chandra successfully attempted through his literary works.

### Nationalism and Social Solidarity.

Discussing the political philosophy of Tagore Dr. Sachin Sen opines that "European unity and Hindu unity are two different concepts. The word Nation can notes a type of unity which does not exist in India, but it should not confuse us into thinking that there is no unity in Hindu civilization.[15]" We are inclined to agree with Dr. Sen. Civilization seeks to achieve unity in diversity. This has been the basis of Indian civilization in her own way. Europe has become great through the agency of her state. Hence, in Europe governmental cohesion and national unity are the same. The Hindu has achieved unity through his social organism. In India society is the ruling force. It is only through solidarity of society that India is not yet extinct, that she is still living. This was what Tagore also believed and held. Tagore accordingly essayed national unity through social solidarity.

Vidyapati's thesis is very much akin to Tagore's thesis on this point. Vidyapati like Tagore was concerned with providing a social cement to unite the various groups and creeds of the society together. Significantly both attempted the social solidarity by emphasising the universal religion and an Aryan approach to purify the soul. Both were synthetic philosophers and tried to achieve national unity by reforming the social organism.

Religion has been the greatest divisive force in India. India was even partitioned on the ground of religion which has cost us so heavy. In Vidyapati's days also society was torn asunder by different religious creeds and faiths. Narrow sectarianism was at its peak in the contemporary society. Some people worshipped Shiva taking only Him to be the supreme diety. To others, Shakti was the exclusive object of adoration. Vaishnavism alone as a religious persuasion

was followed by many Maithils. Vidyapati wanted to put an end to this artificial division of society on grounds of many religions. For this Vidyapati invented a religious synthetic. He composed poems in praise of various gods and goddesses to underline the fundamental unity of religions and the principle of universal brotherhood under the fatherhood of God.

Vidyapati in his Mahesbanis ( hymns of Lord Shiva ) sang glories to Lord Shiva. In the book called Saiva Sarvaswa Sar, Vidyapati has exhaustively dealt with the powers of Lord Shiva and the various ways in which He is worshipped and should be worshipped. In the drama called Goraksha-vijaya, he has invoked the blessings of Bhairava, a diety of Lord Shiva as its arch type. He also composed a number of poems in praise of the eternal symbols of Love–Radha and Krishna. The padas ( Poems ) are mostly hymns to Lord Krishna and his consort Radha. In some padas he sang the glory of Goddess Durga. He also wrote an independent treatise in praise of Goddess Durga. He even composed poems on Ganga and Ram. His Gangavakyvali is a testimony of his devotional attitude towards Ganga. In one of his lyrics he made Hari and Mahesha adore the feet of Durga. In two important and popular lyrics[16] he has pointed to this unity of god head. Vidyapati has been quite consistent on this point of religious unity. In the introductory verse of one of his earlier works[17] he has clearly saluted the five gods which were popularly worshipped in his age and even in his mature works he clung to the same view.

"We should also bear in mind that when the poet wrote about the divine Krishna or Madhava, it does not necessarily follow that Vidyapati was a vaishnava. It is not also necessary for us to ascribe the motives of the copying of the "Bhagavata" as have been done by some Scholars.[18]" Just as we find poems on different religious faiths by Rabindra Nath Tagore, so Vidyapati wrote on diverse religious themes.[19]

### Nationalism of Harmony.

Those who have delved deep into the innermost urges of the poet-philosopher are the opinion that Vidyapati stood



for a love oriented polity of a very high order. Behind his love pranks of Radha and Krishna lies his deep longing for system of human relationship based on love and an unity of souls. The all pervading aspect of Vidyapati's lyrics is this love craze of a blessed kind. Sociologists like Sorokin have attached great importance to this aspect of love in Human relationship. "It goes without saying that the finest, the noblest, and the happiest human society is the society of individuals bound together by a love-relationship[20]" "Love Energy" has its use all its own. "The restoring the love-energy in individuals means making their love actions and reactions spontaneously habitual, interiorized and rooted to such an extent that they become second nature.[21]" "The productive capacity of social and cultural power systems of Love" is practically unlimited; potentially unlimited also is the magnitude of its accumulated energy. Its total amount, stored in individuals, institutions and culture, can be sufficient for all the prevention and elimination of crime, revolutions, wars and other forms of conflict where there is underlying hate, envy and unhappiness.

Vidyapati's age was desperately in the need of such a reservoir of love-energy which could be unleashed to end the social chaos and confusion. It was all the necessary because the old social order was itself faced with the danger of total annihilation. Vidyapati, therefore, anticipates the sociological receiple of Sorokin. He, therefore, concentrates on the theme of love. In this emphasis Vidyapati was in tune with such great philosophers of the past as Plato and Aristotle who had also advocated the imperative necessity of love-relationship. They had also held that without love-relationship no good social life is possible. Plato and Aristotle were quite right in their statement that the true friendship or love is the most vital stuff of all true social relationships. Often overlooked,

this function of love shows its unique power in social life and in man's historical process.

1. Benjamin Akzin--State and Nation, P. 10.
2. ,, ,, -- ,, ,, ,, , P. 31-32.
2A. A. E. Zimmern--Nationality and Government.
2B. Also quoted by Dr. B. B. Majumdar--Political Science and Govt., P. 49,
3. Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences--Vol. XI-XII P. 231.
4. Encyclopaedia Britannica--Vol. 16, P. 149.
5. Benjamin Akzin--State and Nation, P. 47.
6. Encyclopaedia Britannica--Vol. 16-P. 149.
7. Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences Vol. XI-XIII, P. 235.
7A. Ibid.
8. Kirtilata--1st Pallava (Desil Bayana Sava Jan Mitha..... Abhhata)
9. G. W. Archer (Int.)-Love Songs of Vidyadati.
10. Dr. A.S. Altekar-Education in Ancient India in the studies in the cultural histery of India, P. 101.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Benjamin Akzin--State and Nation, P. 128.
14. Pt. Parmeshwar Jha ( Edit.), Published from Union Press, Darbhanga 1902.
15. Dr. Sachin Sen--Political Thought of Tagore--P-129.
16. Bhala Har Bhala, Hari Bhala Tua Kala.
Khane Pit Vasan Khanihi Baghchala.
16B. Ek Sarir Lel Dui Basa. Khane Baikuntha Khane Kailash Bhanaih Vidyapati Viprit Bani. O Narayan O Sulpani.
17. Natvā Gaṇapatiṃ Śāmbam Śri Vishnuram bikām Bhuparikramaṇagran- tham Likhyate naimishe.
( Introductory verse of the Bhu Parikrama of Vidyapati ).
18. Vaisnavism in Medieval Mithila-B.O.R.S.J. ( Vol. XLVIII ) P. 27.
19. Dr, B. P, Majumdar Vol. XLVIII of J.B.R.S.--1962.
20. Pritim Sorokin--Love Energy, extract from the Bhavan's Journal, Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan.--Dec. 23rd. 1962.
21. ,, ,, ,, Nov. 11th 1962.
Extract from "The Reconstruction of humanity."

# Vidyapati

## The Prophet Of Prolitariat

The notion of equality is central to the theme of the democratic idea. "Just as the history of the state can perhaps be most effectively written in terms of the expanding claims of the common man upon the results of its efforts, so the development of the realisation of equality is the clue to the problem of democracy.[1]" The basis of the democratic development is therefore the demand for equality, the demand that the system of power be erected upon the similarities and not the differences between men of the permanence of this demand there can be no doubt; at the very dawn of Political Science Aristotle insisted that its denial was the main cause of revolutions. It may seem strange that even during the middle ages when feudalism was the established order an Indian Social thinker should have struck such a progressive note of equality as to shake the very foundations of erstwhile social order. Vidyapati carved out a singular glorious place for himself in the annals of the democratic movement by expounding such a progressive theory of egalitarianism which can compare favourably with democratic ideas of such accepted Political Philosophers as a Mill or a Marx. Vidyapati's egalitarianism had a big canvas, big enough to cover different facets of the doctrine of equality which is the very essence of the democratic ideal.

### Equality Of The Sexs.

Like all great Political abstractions the notion of equality bears rich associations with the complexities of human life. The concept of democratic equality postulates that ahuman person, irrespective of biological distinctions of sex, is entitled to equal and fair treatment. Distinctions based on sex are the very negation of democratic creed. Unfortunately the medieval age in Indian history was such a dark period in which women were denied their rightful place in the body-Politic. Notwithstanding the professed superiority of the women in the social scale, the general condition of the women

in actual practice was very degraded. They were no better than the slaves or chattels. The roads to Political power were blocked for them. Indifference of the society towards their plight, social disabilities like Polygamy and child marriage, callous husbands, all these had brought the women-folk to the brink of the degradation. "Ekal Kamini Bahula Kanta" meaning too many ladies for one male lover was the prevailing order. The women-folk were generally uneducate d and but for the ladies of the upper strata of society they were denied access to education. In short, women were unequal to men in more ways than one.

Vidyapati deserves our approbation for detecting this great social malady and Political anomaly. He wanted to give a better deal to the women-folk. For this he decided to underscore the condition of the women of the contemporary era. He, therefore, limelights Radha and only casually talks of Krishna. In his treatment of the love theme woven round Radha and Krishna he focusses his gaze more on Radha than on Krishna. A keen student of Vidyapati Mr. Archer has taken special notice of this essentially feminine approach of Vidyapati which is in marked contrast to the approaeh of Jaya 'eva whom Vidyapati imitated. Mr. Archer says that "In contrast to the robustly male approach ( of Jayadeva ) Vidyapati is almost feminine" "It is Radha's career as a young girl, her slowly awakening youth, her physical charm, her shyness, doubts and hesitations, her need for love and attention, her anguish when neglected which engage Vidyapati." In case of Jayadeva it is the heroism of Krishna which attracts him most. Thus Vidyapati shows in clear unmistakable terms his preference for Radha, the feminine species of contemporary humanity, the underdogs of the social order.

In his poems called the Mahesbanis ( hymns of Lord Shiva ) the poet reiterates his sympathetic concern for the women-folk in his symbolic presentation of the plight of Gouri, the divine consort to Lord Shiva. He paints with a poet's perfection the hard lot and the sad plight whcih



awaited the contemporary women personified in Gouri. How a typical contemporary woman eked out a miserable existence doing all day long the errands of her husband, without any access to economic or social uplift is best illustrated in some of the famous lines of Vidyapati. In his Mahesbanis there is throughout a heartfelt sympathy for the misery and predestined slave status of the women of his age. As in the case of Radha-Krishna love theme, so also in the Lord Shiva and Gouri relationship the focus the throws is on Gouri, the female, the underfed, under-clothed, uneducated sector of humanity.

Listen Vidyapati echoing the feelings of a typical woman "seated in the tattered hut she paints a mental picture of her surroundings.[3]" She cannot move freely for the movements are restricted or look at another picture of Gouri-"after she has kept the water boiling to cook, she goes to beg for a loan but alas! no one is prepared even grant her any loan[4] Such examples from Vidyapati's Mahesbanis can be produced an infinitum to depict the economic condition of a typical woman of his age-sans worldly conforts, sans political power, sans economic significance. Even in his sanskrit works he has given vent to this feeling of degraded condition of the women-folk. In the P. P. Vidyapati clearly says that women have necessarily a dependent status-they depend for their existence on male. Like the child and the coward they depend upon the mercy of the male.[5] "Just as a creeper may not live when parted from the tree to which it clingeth, nor, a woman parted from her husband.[6]"

Thus Vidyapati deserves our approbation for exposing in all its hollowness the tall claim of the male dominated society that women were treated as divine beings. By lime lighting Radha and Gouri as examples of male exploitation and denied all lovers of power he became one of the early champions of the rights of women-Long before the cause of emancipation of women came to the air in the western world Vidyapati touched this vital democratic note and anticipated even John Stuart Mill.

### J. S. Mill & Vidyapati.

Before J. S. Mill tells us what reforms he hopes for in the field of the rights of women, he sketches for us the actual state of woman. "The subject woman is emphatically his heroine, and she has been held captive by the monster man[7]. Mill sets her before us, laden not only with personal chains, but with the shadow of those fetters in which her mother and all her female ancestors have been bound. As he writes there rises up before us the enormous shade of a despotism Vaster and more monstrous than any other conceived by the most male volent of despots.[8]" We seem to see one half of the race turned into Minute and scientific tyrants, and the other half into blind and servile slaves. So deeply has her bondage entered into the nature of woman, we learn, that after all these thousand years we are in no position to say what she can or cannot do. She has never had the remotest chance of fair play. She has been so held down, silenced and oppressed that we can scarcely for a right idea of what she wishes, for her faculties have been benumbed by the damp and chill of the prison house in which she was born.[9]"

It will, thus be evident that centuries before J. S. Mill Vidyapati had admirably painted the plight of the women-folk in such overpo vering symbols and sounds that a climate for reform was bound to usher in the years which followed. It is true that Vidyapati did not speak in terms of the suffrage or representative democracy for that matter had not yet appeared on the scene. The various reform Acts which had set the political norm before Mill had not yet seen the light of the day when Vidyapati had set his pen. It is the height of political sagacity that he revolted with all the modesty of a poet's sensitive symbolism in an age when a lesser democrat would never have thought of even opening his eyes to the negation of democratic rights round him.

### Social Equality.

The basis of democratic development, says H. J. Laski, is the demand for equality, the demand that the system of



power be erected upon the similarities and not the differences between men.[10] This ultimately boils down to the acceptance of the doctorine of social equality. The demand for social equality is both older and more recent than that for either Political or economic equality. Protest against the possession of privilege by birth goes back to a very early period.[11] Ideas of social equality have worked out into concrete forms in several different directions. They had an influence in the humanitarian protest against slavery. They find expression in protests against the aristocratic principle. They animate the struggle for racial equality.[12]

Vidyapati in the medieval era struck a revolutionary note by proclaiming in clear unequivocal terms rights of man irrespective of accidents of birth. In him we find the hearalder of the democratic faith that a man is a man for all that and all that which poet Burns immortaliesed in one of his famous poems. A human being, to what-ever station he may belong, and low he might have been born in worthy of highest democratic treatment." A man's condition is to be blamed, not the man himself,[13]" Says Vidyapati.

The moral of the story gives us the clue to know the democratic springs of Vidyapati's heart. What man has achieved in its long struggle towards the realisation of what Michel has termed as the "eminent dignity of human personality" was granted by Vidyapati when the idea of human dignity had not yet been born. Right from the American Declaration of Independence to the Declaration of universal human rights under the auspices of U. N. O. man kind has waged a relentless struggle to secure for itself the eminent dignity of human personality. It was no mean achievement in an age of feudalism to sing the glory of individual human personality and dignity.

In his classical poetic work the Kirtilata Vidyapati has set a very high standard of human dignity and personality. Who is a real man and in what does his humanity consist ? he poses the question himself. His answer is that "he is a man who has a sense of honour."

"If a man has manly qualities he is to be called a man. A man should not be so called if he lacks the manly qualities just as a cloud cannot be called a cloud if it does not shower rain. So also is a man who has a sense of honour.[14] Thus Vidyapati wants to set man on the highest pedestal of respectability. He wants men to be accorded an honourable place. But he is equally emphatic that a man must also come up to human standards of perfection. Being a progressive thinker Vidyapati revolted against the aristocratic principle of respectability based on birth.

In his Likhnavali he has raised his banner against the institution of slavery. In many letters he has described how male and female slaves with their family members were sold or mortgaged for a paltry sum of three or four rupees.[15] Vidyapati's deliberate effort to paint in vivid details the age, the colour, name and address of the slaves sold showts how he was shocked at the institution. The institution of slavery was the negation of the democratic creed. Like Abraham Lincoln who was appalled at the presence of the institution of slavery and revolted against the presence in stronges words--"Half the world cannot be slave, half free," Vidyapati condemned the institution of slavery by pinpointing the institution in all its naked-ness. To sum up, Vidyapati forms in line with that band of social thinkers who have raised the banner of social equality and held high the ideal of human person, irrespective of birth or sex, position or pelf.

Some people may object that as the democratic idea is traditionally considered to make its appearance only in the eighteenth century after the French Legions had extended the democratic notions of liberty, equality and fraternity Vidyapati could not have possibly conceived of the democratic aspect of social equality in the 15th century. But that is to miss the Essence of the Democracy, which is at bottom a way of life. "Considered as a way of life, democracy is a subjective attitude by which the members of the community are led to secure to everyone his rights to look upon all



fellow citizens without distinction of colour or race as brethren in a common enterprise and to give spontaneous support to projects which enhance civic excellence and promote the general welfare.[16] In this sense democracy approaches the "virtue" which the old philosophers and the founding fathers of America considered the Principal characteristic of citizenship and akin to the medeval "justice" by which all members of the community were to co-operate by joint action to give each one his due. In this sense, therefore, democracy is not necessarily allied either with democratic theory or democratic institutions but could exist under any form of Govt. [17] So, it is no wonder-through very creditable that even under the aristocratic form of Govt. with an enlightened kingship at its head Vidyapati provided the democratic ideal which can be called revolutionery even by modern standards.

### The Economic Democracy.

"The economic side of Democracy is socialism itself" this is what even J. S. Mill conceded during the late years of the last century. Modern scholarship has gone further ahead in accepting the necessary co-relation between economic equality and Political liberty. H. J. Laski voices the sentiment of a representative modern school of Social and Political thinkers when he writes that "Political equality, therefore, is never real unless it is accompained by virtual economic equality, Political power, otherwise, is bound to be the handmaida of economic power.[18]" Economic unequality, or economic exploitation of any section is the negation of democratic faith. Economic democracy is a necessary adjunct of the Political democracy "Economic democracy means the application of the democratic principle of equality to the economic structure of society.[19]" It may sound strange that a medieval Indian Political thinker could go to the root of the democratic problem by under scoring the importance of the economic equality.

Vidyapati does not talk of economic democracy in the jargon of the Marxists. He does not even casually mention the class war or the economic base of the socio-Political order. Nor does he wax eloquent on the economic justice and glibly talk of planned economy or such economic panacea. What he does is to expose in all nakedness the stark poverty to which the bulk of the society was given with the artist's gift of faithful portrayal of the hard economic reality he presents a true heart rendering picture of the economic have-nots of his age. He does not mince words when he sympathetically presents the picture of the proletariate of his age.

"I was born in misery and never found happiness in life" [20] —puts Vidyapati in the mouth of one of the contemporary souls as a representative of the state of the entire economically down trodden class. Look at the picture of Lord Shiva, the human incarnate of the common man of his age, dressed in rags or draped in the animal skin up to the loon. Lord Shiva has neither a home nor a hearth. He is without any means of subsistence. He does not control the forces of production. In other words he is a lazy-bone, rendered useless by the economic exploitation. The wives of such proletariate males have to work hard whole day long-they have neither the time for leisure nor for any fruitful participation in the civic life. The peasant does not have even land to plaugh for in the feudal system land-ownership was based on a relationship of a different kind. The natural outcome of this economic order was that the economically have-nots were also politically and socially exploited. The system of usury to which we find references in his Likhnavali [21] corroborates the Marxian tenet that economically superior class exploited the economically backward class by charging exorbitant rates of interest, both in cash and kind. As there was no state relief forthcoming the proletariate had to sell themselves and theirfamily members for meeting both ends. We find in many letters of the Likhnavali examples of the sale of the human person with all the sanctity of society and law [22].



True to the Marx-Engels formula of the law of socio-economic development we find that civilization strengthened and increased all the established divisions of labour, particularly by intensifying the contrast between town and country and added a third division of labour, peculiar to itself and of decisive importance, it created a class took no part in production, but engaged exclusively in exchanging products the merchants. "All previous incohative formations of classes were exclusively connected with production, they divided those engaged in production into managers and perfomers or into producers on a large scale and producers on a small scale. Here a class appears for the first time which, without taking any part in production, captures the management of production as a whole and economically subjugates the producers to its rule; a class that makes itself the indespensable intermediary between sets of two producers each and exploits them both [23]. A class of parasites, "genuine social sycophants, who as a reward for very insignificant real services skin the cream off production at home and rapidly amass enormous wealth and corresponding social influenced appeared on the stage [24]. A study of Jyotrishwar's Varna Ratnakara [25], and Vidyapati's Kirtilata and Purush Pariksha would bear out the above contention that the merchant class had become such an economically and socially dominant force that they controlled of levers of power. The ruling class also depended to a great extent upon this class for the supply of scent, incense and other luxuries. We get reference to the sale of sandal wood, Camphor etc. in Vidyapati's works.

Thus economically society was divided into two classes-the class of the economically have's and the class of the have-nots. For a balanced Polity this disparity was a perennial source of weakness for Aristotle had warned centuries earlier that great economic disparity between various classes bred revolution. Vidyapati, therefore, like Aristotle prescribed a more just distribution of economic wealth though he prefers to use simple everyday language instead of classical language of the Political Science.

In the "Tale of the silly rich man [26] " Vidyapati brings home the moral that wealth has a social use and social origin. Hoarding of wealth at the cost of productive social use is condemnable is a text book maxim of egalitarian economy. "Money grabbing is simple slavery, [27] " says Vidyapati In another context he openly says that "necessity of wealth is a doubtful matter.[28]" Wealth has a national use and the rulers of the day should see that wealth is put to socially productive channels. In almost all modern progressive states the raison detre of the death duty and Estate duty is the idea that the unearned income of the individual should go to the community. Vidyapati anticipated this socialistic measure long before text book writers of economics have given the concept by emphasising in the Tale of a Miser that "when thou art dead the money will no annexed by the King. [29] He criticised in particular the tendency to hoard gold-long before we are faced with the measure of Gold Control.

A pungent dig at the inequality of wealth is concealed in this line of Vidyapati—"Whether a king or a commoner, a man can eat but a couple of pounds of food and no more.[30]" He reiterates the egalitarian principle of social use for wealth by emphasising that "with wealth the other three objects of life should not be neglected Wealth is no cause for true happiness; riches help not to save a man's life nor are riches a cause of comfort. "Vidyapati pleads for an economic minimum to all to make the Polity prosperous and contented. The consequences of denial of economic minimum may be disastrous. The absence of economic minimum may force a citizen to adopt desperate anti-social ways to earn his living. In "The Tale of a Thief" Vidyapati clearly says that "what evils spring not from our poverty ?. It yoketh men in sin; it giveth them misery for food; theft it maketh men commit, and knavery it teacheth them; to the wretch it giveth voice and causeth him to go a begging from the mean. [31] "A basic minimum should be provided to all before there can be a stable Polity.

Generally speaking the middle ages are not considered propitous for the advancement of the democratic or socialistic ideas. This is as much true of the west as of the East. "In the west, medieval thought, that of St. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, though it maintains the Christian dogma of spritual equality of men in the eyes of God, denies that men are equals on earth. Feudal organisation suggested an organic view of the state, where quite different men perform different functions for different rewards; and Church traditions suggested a patriarchial view of the state, where the unequal sufferings of men followed as punishment for original sin and where clergy and nobles, as God's lieutenants, protected the lower orders. Yet the middle ages hardly achieved in fact this social equilibrium. [32] "Even orthodox doctrine holds that Christianity exists to combat the consequences of original sin, among which are merely worldly inequalities. In the East the social disabilities attendant upon the caste and sex differences as well as the economic gulf which existed between the feudal nobility and the lower layers had made equality only a far cry. It is Vidyapati's genius that in the medieval era when feudalism in its heyday was crushing all ideas of individualism, equality and socialism with its socio-political steam roller Vidyapati had the foresight to catch the coming wind and the courage to raise his banner of revolt against the erstwhile order.

This was no mean achievement for a man, born and brought up in the atmosphere of feudal splendour and himself being a beneficiary and functional associate of the system. In a sense, Like Jawaharlal Nehru, who inspite of his aristocratic background turned one of the greatest democrats, Vidyapati though flourishing in a courtly feudal atmosphere, had the democrat's consience and a leader's strength to turn to egalitarianism. It is true his egalitarianism has none of the present day academic sophistications about it-it stands for a fair deal to human personality, to all classes, to both the sexes, without distinction of any kind. He wanted to translate ineveryday use the content of the modern doctrine of the economic equality with its note of economic minimum.

---

1. H. J. Laski—Encyclopaedia of the Social Science Vol. 5-6, P. 76.

2. G. W. Archer ( Int. )—Love Songs of Vidyapati.
3. "Tutale phutale maraiyā adhika sobāona he
Tahitara baisali Gauri nanahi mana Jhākathi he
( From Mahakavi Vidyapati by Harinandan Thakur Saroja ).
4. Adahana delanhi cadhāya Paiṇca johaya gelīha he
Ehana nagara ke Loka Paiṇco nah-iṇ diaya he,
Ibid.
5. P. P.-The Tale of a Hero Valorous P. 13.
6. P. P.—The Tale of a Hero Compassionate P. 12.
7. Robert H. Murray--Studies in the English Social and Political thinkers of the 19th century, P. 423.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Encyclopaedia of the Social Science--Vol. 5-6, P. 76.
11. ,, ,, ,, ,, -- ,, ,, ,, P, 77.
12. ,, ,, ,, ,, -- ,, ,, ,, P. 78.
13. P. P.-The Tale of a Man acute in Wit, P. 40.
14. Hara Prasad Shastri--Kirtilata, Eng. and Bengali translation.
15. Likhnavali Letter No. 55 ( B. R. B P. trans. ).
16. Encyclopaedia Britannica--Vol. ?, P. 185.
17. Ibid.
18. Harold J. Laski--Grammar of Politics, P. 162.
19. Donald E. Smith--Nehru and Democracy--P. 101.
20. Dukhahi Janma bhela dukhahi gamāola Sukha kabiyo nahiṇ paola he bholānāṭha.
21. Ref. B in chapter "Institutions" of the thesis.
22 Ref. A in chapter "Institutions" of the thesis.
23. Selected works of Marx and Engels--Vol. II, P. 313.
24. Selected works of Marx and Engels, Vol. II, P. 314.
25. Ref. Jyotrishwar's Varna Ratnakar and Vidyāpati's Kritilata for description of Hat.
26. P. P.--The Tale of a Silly rich man--P. 141.
27. ,, -- ,, ,, ,, ,, ,, ,, -- P. 142.
28. P. P.--The Tale on worldly prosperity-P. 139
29. P. P.--The Tale of a Miser-P. 34.
30. P.P. --The Tale of a Millionaire Magnanimous, P. 139.
31. P. P.-P. 22,
32. Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences--Vol. 5-6, P. 576

## The Author

The author Dr. Shankar Kumar Jha is a senior and reputed teacher of Political Science. Beginning his career as a lecturer in Political Science in 1952, he received his doctorate from the University of Bihar on his thesis "Political ideas and institutions in the works of Vidyapati'. Promoted as Reader in 1970 Dr. Jha has taught at L. S. College, Muzaffarpur; and at the University departments of Political Science in L. N. Mithila University and Bihar University. He was selected under the Colombo Plan by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India to teach Political theory at the Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu. A known Political Commentator, his Commentaries on national and international affairs have appeared in English and Hindi dailies of Bihar, and learned Journals like The Modern Review, Economic and Political Weekly, Secular Democracy etc. Dr. Jha has Successfully guided research leading to the award of Ph. D., both in Political Science and Sociology. He has written many Papers on the Politics of Nepal which are published in research Journals of India and Nepal. Dr. Jha is at present Principal of Purnia College at Purnia ( Bihar ).

# VIDYAPATI

## A

## Political Analysis

BY

Dr. Shankar Kumar Jha

PRINCIPAL

PURNIA COLLEGE, PURNIA

SHIVAANI PRAKASHAN

DARBHANGA